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A King and a Fool?

The Succession Narrative as a Satire

By

Virginia Miller

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I dedicate this book to Douglas Colin Muecke (*1919–2015*)
and Jay Harold Ellens (*1932–2018*)

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Power [is] always sincerely, conscientiously *de tres foi* [in very good faith] and believes itself right. Power always thinks it has a great soul, and vast views, beyond the comprehension of the weak; and that it is doing God's service, when it is violating all his laws.

JOHN ADAMS in a letter to Thomas Jefferson (1816)[1]

1 John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, February 2, 1816, in *The Adams Jefferson Letters*, ed. Leston J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 482, amended by Reinhold Niebuhr, *Irony in American History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 21. Original date of publication 1952.

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Abbreviations

BEThL	*Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibIntS	*Biblical Interpretation series*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CQR	*Church Quarterly Review*
Int	*Interpretation*
JBQ	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JHScr	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
NAS	New American Standard Bible
NKJ	New King James Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
RB	*Revue biblique*
SHBC	*Smyth & Helwyns Bible Commentary*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*
WBC	*Word Biblical Commentary*
BCE	before the Common Era
ISBL	International Congress of the Society of Biblical Literature
OT	Old Testament
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAT	Speech Act Theory
SN	Succession Narrative
Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Judg	Judges
Sam	Samuel
Kgs	Kings
Ps	Psalms
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Ezek	Ezekiel

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Introduction

The question of genre has dominated scholarship focused on the narrative of King David in the Second Book of Samuel and the First Book of Kings. This narrative has variously been called, the Succession Narrative,[1] the Court History,[2] and the David Saga.[3] In this book, *A King and a Fool? The Succession Narrative as a Satire,* I offer a new perspective on the genre of, what I will hereafter refer to as, the Succession Narrative (SN). In this book I argue that the SN is in fact a satire.

Among biblical scholars, there are a number of competing views regarding the genre of the SN. Albeit, the picture has been complicated by the over-lap between the genres; however, some distinct groupings of genre have emerged. The main groupings of these views of the genre of the SN are as follows: national epic,[4] propaganda,[5] wisdom literature,[6] theological 'history' writing,[7] and literary art.[8] I argue that the SN is not a national epic as David is presented

1 Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, ed. J. W. Rogerson, trans. Michael D. Rutter and David M. Gunn (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), 84. German original, Leonhard Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (Stuttgart, Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1926).

2 James W. Flanagan, "Court History or Succession Document? A Study of 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2," *JBL*, 91, 2, (Jun. 72), 172–181.

3 John Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

4 Scholars of note include: Edmond Jacob, *Histoire et historiens dans l'ancien testament* (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1957), 29; William McKane, *I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 19 and Christopher R. North, *The Old Testament Interpretation of History* (London: The Epworth Press, 1953), 34. Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Adam and Charles Black Limited, 1952), 358.

5 Scholars of note include: Timothy C. G. Thornton, "Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings," *CQR*, 169 [371] (1968), 159–166; P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "Plots, True and False. The Succession Narrative as Court Apology," *Int* 35 4 (1981), 355–367; Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960); Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East.* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015); Keith W. Whitelam, and "The Defence of David," *JSOT*, 29 (1984), 61–87, 62.

6 Roger Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kgs 1 and 2* (London: SCM Press, 1968).

7 Scholars of note include: Gerhard von Rad, "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel," in *From Genesis to Chronicles. Explorations in Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); Walter Brueggemann, "On Trust and Freedom: A Study of Faith in the Succession Narrative," *Int*, 26 (1972), 3–19; and Steven McKenzie, *King David. A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

8 Scholars of note include: Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978); Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David*; and

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as a complex character, who is not heroic. The SN is critical of David and could therefore fit into a broad category of propaganda. However, in the light of Keys research,[9] I argue that the SN is too ambiguous to fit neatly into the genre of propaganda. Furthermore, I argue that Whybray's focus on wisdom literature is inconsistent with the ironic episodes of 'wisdom' in the text, as Ridout points out.[10] I have also discounted the idea that the SN is merely theological 'history' writing. Certainly, the stories have historical and theological dimensions. However, the primary purpose of the SN is not to document history. Arguably, the SN has a theological function. The theological material is particularly evident in reference to God's punishment of David. However, a question arises as to how this theological function is realised. My suggestion is that it is done so in large measure by means of the genre of satire. At any rate, the claim that the SN is *merely* theological writing is implausible.

Since I contend that the SN is a satire, I take as my starting point the trajectory of thought which holds that the narrative contained in the SN is literary art. However, I argue that it is a particular species of literary art, namely, literary art with historical content and a theological function. The argument that this text is literary art and not merely historical writing is convincing. For the SN is replete with literary flourishes and motifs common in story-telling. Moreover, the plot and character development have more in common with literary art than with the other genres.

Furthermore, the claim that the SN is a satire is convincing as there are elements in the SN which satisfy all of the identifying features of satire. Most importantly, the SN has an object of ironic attack along with evidence of the essential element of satire—pervasive and confrontational irony. The SN also includes the characteristic, albeit non-essential, features of satire including, grotesqueries, distortions, ridicule, parody, and rhetorical features.

My conception of satire as a genre is that it is to be understood primarily in terms of tone and purpose rather than form. Hence, satires can take different forms such as novels, cartoons, plays or for our purpose biblical narratives. Moreover, the genre of satire is evidenced in its pejoratively critical tone and

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Jan Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel. A full interpretation based on stylistic and structural analyses.* Vol. I. "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)" (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1981). Vol. II. "The Crossing Fates (I Sam. 13–31 & II Sam. 1)" (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1986). Vol. III. "Throne and City (II Sam. 2–8 & 21–24)" (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1990). Vol. IV. "Vow and Desire (I Sam. 1–12)" (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1993).

9 Gillian Keys, *Wages of Sin* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 22.

10 George P. Ridout, "Prose Compositional Technique in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 7, 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2)" (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1971), 127.

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in its function—to criticize the object of ironic attack. Thus, the genre of satire is more dependent on content or meaning than on form.

Accordingly, the forms in which the ironist expresses him or herself change over time and in different social contexts as, of course, do the specific satirical meanings expressed which relate to historical figures, ideas or conditions. Moreover, satire can be dependent on socio-historical contexts in other ways. For instance, the satiric content of satires written in Ancient Greece, such as Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, tended to be more ambiguous than the satiric content of modern US TV satire, such as *The Tonight Show*. Again, the acceptable level of crudity in satire can vary across cultures; *Charlie Hebdo* was generally acceptable to the French but might not be to Australians. Therefore, on my conception of the genre of satire, satire is dependent in a number of important respects on socio-historical context. Although the meaning or content of satire is obviously to a greater or lesser extent conditioned by socio-historical context it does not follow from this that all or even most satire is fully determined by prevailing ideology or cultural conditions. Indeed, the view that satire is thus determined is self-defeating since it would undermine a primary purpose of the genre of satire, namely, to subject the status quo, dominant ideologies and so on to critique. Accordingly, if satire is to achieve its purpose the satirist must have a capacity for independent reflection and a strong individualistic streak.

My approach is consistent with scholars who are committed to genre taxonomies but also with those who hold that genres undergo change over time and can accommodate a strong individualistic element.[11] I note that the development of genre taxonomies is a long and established area of scholarship which cannot be lightly dismissed. I also note that even scholars who emphasise the changing character of genre do not wish to do away with the notion of genre entirely but are merely calling for a more flexible approach to genre. My approach is a common-sense and well-evidenced one that classifies genres and satire in particular by recourse to clearly stated identifiable features notably, in the case of satire, verbal irony. That said my approach has a degree of flexibility built into it in that I acknowledge that satire can take different forms and that satirists can have a strong individualist, even idiosyncratic, streak that is expressed in their satires.

My approach to genre is broadly consistent with that of Kynes. Kynes allows for the possibility of texts belonging to multiple genres.[12] Regarding the SN, I agree that it is possible that it fits into different genre groupings given that it

11 Please see Carol A. Newsom, "Spying out the Land: A Report from Genology". In, *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients.* Ed. R. Troxel, et al. (Winoa Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

12 Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature".* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

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has a historical focus, and a theological character, as well as being, as I argue at great length in this work, a satire. However, I contend that while genre groupings can be multiple, and can overlap in the manner of a family resemblance,[13] they must not be contradictory, so as to invalidate each other. For instance, the SN may be a satire and also history writing; however, it is not consistent for the SN to be a satire that mocks David, and simultaneously a national epic that praises David. Moreover, it is my claim that if there are multiple genre classifications it is also reasonable to argue for a dominant genre, as I do in this research.

Importantly, my argument relies on the presence of an author who intentionally imparts some meaning into the text. This is not to deny that the reader brings meaning to the text and that there is meaning in the text that the author is not aware of. However, it is to reject unbalanced interpretative models such as that of Belsey according to which the author has, at best, an attenuated role while the role of the reader is greatly exaggerated. Belsey's and related models are predicated on the idea that the author is a discursive construct and, as such, does not have the capacity for originary meaning.[14] By contrast, I am in favor of an interpretative model that considers the contributions to meaning of the reader, the author, the text considered in itself, and the socio-historical influences on the text, including the context of the writing and the context of the reading.[15] I agree with Freadman and Miller who argue convincingly that the meaning of written sentences is partly dependent on the language they belong to, partly dependent on the context in which they are written and, crucially, that the meaning of these sentences in context is to a considerable extent determined by the intention of the author who wrote them. Moreover, being dependent on authorial intention, this meaning is not only produced by an individual but likely to be individualistic and, at least potentially, original and profound.[16]

As mentioned above, my interpretative approach in this book is both historical and literary. I engage with the *sitz im leben* of the text and the literary form of the text. In the first instance, it is necessary to understand the social and historical context of a narrative in order to extract precise meaning from the text. For instance, it is necessary to have knowledge of customs of feasting in the Ancient Near East if we are to understand that David's act of feasting after the death of his child (2 Sam. 11:20) is anomalous and somewhat cold-hearted.

13 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).
14 Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice.* (London: Methuen, 1980).
15 Richard Freadman & Seumas Miller, *Re-thinking Theory.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 28–33.
16 Ibid. chapter 7.

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With this knowledge of context, it can be argued that the intended purpose of the narrative is to criticize David's behaviour. By contrast, if it is standard to feast in a mourning period, then the text would not appear to be critical of David on this occasion. If we consider the text on its own, taken out its historical context, we cannot know if the text is critical of David or not; surely a lesser means of interpretation than the one employed in this book. Moreover, if we do not situate the SN in its historical context, we have no way of understanding the many foreign themes in this narrative. For instance, the themes of hospitality and blood guilt, not to mention peculiarities such as Absalom's hair-cutting ritual (2 Sam. 14:26) and mourning rituals involving pouring ashes on oneself and tearing robes.

However, I also understand this narrative as a work of literature. Therefore, my interpretation marries historical critical and literary critical interpretative methods. Understanding the SN as a work of literary art allows for an interpretation of literary devices such as irony and parody. Accepting these literary devices allows for a more sophisticated interpretation of the narrative. This kind of approach is also important for understanding the historical context of the narrative. For instance, if someone in a narrative is being parodied then this person must have features (or is being claimed to have features) that are regarded by the people of the culture in question as ridiculous, unworthy or otherwise highly undesirable.

As my approach uses literary criticism it is important to discuss genre, and satire in particular. In doing so it is necessary to understand that naming a biblical text as a satire is not anachronistic. It is my argument that although the descriptive term "satire" did not exist at the time the SN was written, texts possessing the features definitive of the genre did exist and, indeed, the SN is one of those texts. Therefore, it is not anachronistic to claim that the SN is a satire. The key features of satire are a pervasive use of verbal irony, the use of grotesqueries etc. and a target of ironic attack. These features depend on language, surely the most central form of human communication. Moreover, the use of irony is common to most, if not all, human languages. Indeed, evidently the use of irony seems natural to human beings; certainly, the use of irony to criticise persons, ideas etc. is commonplace throughout history and in most, if not all, cultures. And there is a good reason for this; irony involves contrasting appearance and reality, and very often criticising someone or something. Thus, on speaking of irony, Sedgewick remarks that irony is a natural expression of the reflective mind contrasting reality with appearance.[17] I conclude that my discussion of irony and satire in relation to the SN is not anachronistic.

17 G. G. Sedgewick, *Of Irony, Especially in Drama*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1948), 5.

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While the overarching thesis of this work is that the SN is a satire, the main preoccupation is with irony and, in particular, verbal irony. The reason for this is that irony, and verbal irony in particular, is now generally accepted—on the basis of Douglas Muecke's ground-breaking work, *The Compass of Irony*[18]—as the essential feature of satire.

Accordingly, I have applied an importantly modified version of Douglas Muecke's definitions of verbal irony, as they appear in his book, *The Compass of Irony* (1969) to the SN. I have also to a much lesser extent used some of his ideas in his later, but less considered and much less comprehensive work, *Irony and the Ironic* (2018).[19] In choosing this approach I benefit from the comprehensive nature of Muecke's taxonomy in *The Compass of Irony* and some of the updates in *Irony and the Ironic*. Furthermore, I have corrected some of Muecke's definitional errors (e.g. with respect to his conflation of the target of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of irony—see Chapter 2 on methodology for discussion) and hence my methodology is a combination of Muecke's comprehensive work, his most recent work and my corrections to his earlier work—corrections that were not made in Muecke's recent work. I chose to use Muecke's influential taxonomy of irony because it is flexible enough to allow for the variety and vagueness of irony, while sufficiently structured to ensure the notion of irony is kept within reasonable parameters. Moreover, he has created a comprehensive list of categories of the grades and modes of satirical irony, and sub-categories of the modes of satirical irony. I apply this modified taxonomy of verbal irony to the SN and find verbal irony to be a pervasive feature of the SN, thereby, demonstrating (given the co-existence of some other features that are in fact present in SN) that the SN is in fact a satire.

Most of the major scholars who have written on the SN have identified multiple ironic elements in the story.[20] However, these commentaries have

18 D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969).

19 D. C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* (London: Routledge, 2018).

20 Scholars of note include: Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981). Original date 1965; Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2;* George P. Ridout, "Prose Compositional Technique in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 7, 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2)" (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1971); Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*; Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985); Perry and Sternberg, "The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process," *Poetics Today.* Vol. 7, 2 (1986), 275–322; Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible.* Sheffield: Academic Press, 1989; David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell. *Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; McKenzie, *King David. A Biography*; and Carolyn Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009); Virginia Ingram, "David Remains in Jerusalem and Absalom Flees

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differed with respect to the kind of irony that they have identified, and in the significance that they attach to these elements of irony. Most scholars appear to have a merely intuitive response to irony that is evident in statements such as, "it is ironic that …" or "it would appear that Absalom is being ironic …". They do not have or do not utilize a theoretical account of irony; Menachem Perry and Meir Sternberg,[21] and George Ridout[22] are notable exceptions. More importantly, scholars have not systematically investigated or even discussed verbal irony. My investigation of irony in the SN furthers the conversation by defining irony, especially verbal irony, more explicitly and in more detail, and by presenting a thoroughgoing application of the resulting definitions to the SN in support of the proposition that the SN is a satire.

I have done this with the understanding that identifying irony can never be an exact science, as it is the nature of irony to be ambiguous, take different forms and constantly evolve.[23] Some purist scholars even suggest that to define irony is a sacrilege as it takes away the freedom of this creative form of expression.[24] However, I agree with Muecke, who writes that it is impossible to define irony precisely and conclusively, yet, in order to facilitate an academic conversation it is helpful to work with definitions, even if they are somewhat imprecise.[25]

Furthermore, I apply David Marcus' influential taxonomy of the key elements of satire (as opposed to a taxonomy of irony)[26] to the SN in Chapter 9. Marcus' definitions have been chosen over the work of the other scholars mentioned on two grounds. Firstly, Marcus' methodology gives a clear and comprehensive account of the main features of satire from a standard perspective, as opposed to scholars such as Highet whose work is more niched.[27] Secondly, Marcus' work discusses the features of satire as they apply specifically to

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to Geshur: An Ironic Interpretation," in, ed. J. Harold Ellens, *Bethsaida in Archaeology. History and Ancient Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 469–485, and "The Kindness of Irony: A Psychological Look at Irony in 2 Samuel 11," in *Intellect Encounters Faith; A Synthesis. A Festschrift in Honour of J. Harold Ellens PhD*, ed. John T. Greene (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 269–285.

21 Perry and Sternberg, "The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process."

22 Ridout, "Prose Compositional Technique in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 7, 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2)."

23 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 24.

24 Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn* (London: 1949), 191.

25 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 14.

26 Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible.* (Georgia: Scholar's Press, 1995).

27 Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962).

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biblical scholarship. The biblical examples he uses to explain his definitions are, therefore, more helpful to this research, than examples which concentrate on broader literature.

My overall conclusion is that the SN has all of the identifying features of satire. Importantly, the SN has an object of ironic attack—often King David. Moreover, the SN has the essential feature of satire, namely, a pervasive sense of confrontational irony. The SN also includes the characteristic, albeit non-essential, features of satire including, grotesqueries, distortions, ridicule, parody, and rhetorical features. These findings in themselves are sufficient to demonstrate that the SN is a satire. However, the argument that the SN is a satire is further strengthened when I consider the flaws in the competing extant proposals on the question of the genre of the SN.

It is part of the point of verbal irony, and satire, to bring about the correction of vices. This being so, I conclude that the SN has a moral purpose albeit a moral purpose that exists, within a theological framework. Given that the primary purpose of satire is reform, it can be argued that the author of the SN sought reform in the monarchy of Israel and did so in the context of an overall theological worldview.

As mentioned above, I apply Muecke's generic definition of irony, and the specific grades, modes, and sub-categories of verbal irony, as adapted by me, to a sequential reading of the final form of the SN: 2 Sam 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2. I have chosen to apply this methodology to the SN given the general acceptance of Rost's thesis—that the narrative is a self-contained unit. Take for example, Walter Dietrich's following comment, "To this day Rost's careful and impressive reasoning has granted his thesis almost canonical standing at least within German Old Testament scholarship".[28] Yet, unlike Rost I consider 2 Sam 10:6–11:1; 12:26–31 to be consistent with the rest of the narrative suggesting that it was written by the same author or, at the very least, that it is a separate source that was significantly revised by the same author. By contrast, Rost considers these verses to be war annals that were taken from a different source.

It is my argument that there is a pervasive sense of irony throughout 2 Sam 9–20: 1 Kings 1–2 which is a unifying feature of the narrative. This feature is also present in the disputed verses 2 Sam 11:1; 12:26–31. As far as 10:6–19 is concerned, the narrative is not necessarily ironic in and of itself; however, it is still dependent on the irony in 2 Sam 10:1–2. Therefore, it is my claim that this narrative was written by the same author or significantly revised by this author. For instance, David's overstated commitment to *hesed,* in the verses preceding

28 Walter Dietrich, *The Early Monarchy in Israel. The Tenth Century B.C.E.* Trans. Joachim Vette (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 232.

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10:6–11, are ironic because of the ensuing war in verses 10:6–11. Verse 11:1 is an example of verbal irony with an object of ironic and pejorative attack. For instance, the narrative states that springtime was the time of the year when *all* kings go out to war but that King David did not go out to war. Instead, we discover that David is on the roof of his house lusting after an attractive woman who is bathing. In verses 12:26–31 the verbal irony continues as Joab, David's general, tells David to enter the war or Joab will name the city that he has won, in his own name. This is critical and as I go on to explain also ironic. In 12:31 David puts a crown that weighs the same weight as a grown man on his head—this is an overstatement and/or fictitious account and not an historical reporting of the events of the war.

However, it must be noted that I am not entirely convinced that the irony that is present in the SN does not continue. For example, in 1 Kings 3:6 it could be argued that Solomon's statement that God had shown kindness to David because of his faithfulness, and righteousness is ironic; especially given we know that David has been anything but faithful and righteous. I recommend for future research a comprehensive study of potential irony in the verses preceding and succeeding the SN.

For the purpose of this study, which relies on a sizeable single authored narrative, I accept the boundaries of the SN whilst acknowledging that the boundaries of the narrative are a matter of dispute, and that there is a question of whether or not the narrative is much longer than Rost suggests. The boundaries of the SN are not central to my main thesis which is concerned with the presence of irony and satire in the narrative rather than with the exact boundaries of the narrative. My own findings are relevant not only to scholars who accept Rost's thesis, but also to those who dispute the boundaries of the SN and even to those who dispute the existence of the SN.[29] My findings remain relevant for the reason that the pervasive irony and other elements constitutive of satire that I have identified in the Second Book of Samuel and the First Book of Kings remain regardless of the stance one takes on the boundaries of the narrative. It stands that the narrative that is known as the SN is a satire whether or not the satire continues or whether it is limited to the SN.

Furthermore, this study is useful to scholars who are interested in redaction matters concerning the SN. It is useful in as much as it would seem persuasive that if a disputed verse is ironic then it is more likely to be part of the

29 For a full discussion of authors who dispute the existence of the SN read, *Die Sogenannte Thronfolgegeschichte Davids.* Eds. Albert de Pury and Thomas Römer. (Freiburg: Univ.-Verl.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000).

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self-contained narrative. However, this undertaking is beyond the scope of this book which is instead a detailed analysis of irony and satire.

A further point of contention concerns the laws and customs in the SN. Saliently, it cannot be stated with certainty which laws were in place at the time that the SN was written. This is partly because the laws cannot be dated with certainty and partly because the SN cannot be dated with certainty. The arguments that are concerned with dating the SN fall into two general theses (1) that the narrative is pre-exilic[30] and (2) that the narrative is post exilic.[31] Regarding (1), it is generally argued that moral principles were largely understood in terms of, and applied in accordance with, customs. Regarding (2), it is generally argued that moral principles were largely understood in terms of, and applied in accordance with, formal laws. I assume that there was a formal set of laws in place at the time of writing. This is consistent with David's advice to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:3. There it is written, "And keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn …" Whether or not this statement indicates that the SN is pre-Deuteronomistic and therefore (late) pre-exilic, or post-Deuteronomistic and post-exilic, it stands to reason that it was important for the king to follow a formal set of laws. Given this was an important requirement of a king in the Ancient Near East, I explore the SN from the perspective of the laws. In doing so, my work is aligned more with scholars who argue for a later date for the material in the SN. However, the findings of my work are still relevant to scholars who argue for an earlier date for the material in the SN, as formal laws are created from social customs. In order to accommodate this ambiguity, I assume that the commonplace and fundamental social taboos such as murder, rape, theft, and adultery were accepted in the time of the SN. In cases where it cannot be known whether specific laws were in place or not, I treat both perspectives.

My argument unfolds in three main sections: Part 1 (Historical Context and Methodology); Part 2 (Evidence); and Part 3 (Conclusions). Part 1 consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the genre debate and satire. Chapter 2 discusses irony and the methodology used in this book. The major component

30 For a fuller discussion of a pre-exilic dating please see, Von Rad, *The Beginnings of History Writing in Ancient Israel.* Whybray*, The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2*, and John Barton, "Dating the 'Succession Narrative'". Ed. John Day, *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 95–106.

31 For a fuller discussion of a post-exilic dating please see, Gunn, *The Story of King David*, Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David*, and Steven L. McKenzie, *King David. A Biography.*

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of my argument is Part 2 which applies my methodology to the entire SN (Chapters 3 to 8) and lists David Marcus' set of characteristic but non-essential elements of satire (Chapter 9). Part 3 outlines my findings and conclusions. Notably, Chapter 10 discusses the implications of the findings of the above investigations for the genre debate. Chapter 11 discusses irony in the SN and Chapter 12 provides the general conclusion of my argument.

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PART 1

Historical Context and Methodology

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CHAPTER 1

The Genre Debate and Satire

The Hebrew Bible presents contrasting depictions of King David. Chronicles is an unmistakeably favourable account of David's Kingship,[1] whereas the narrative in the latter half of the Book of Second Samuel leading into the Book of First Kings presents a very different picture of David. In this account of David's reign David's character is explored in more depth, particularly in reference to his transgressions. For example, David is portrayed as having an adulterous affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:4), which he tries to conceal by having Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, executed (2 Sam. 11:14–15). Contrary to the favourable account in Chronicles, David is criticised explicitly in this narrative for these transgressions. The narrator writes that God is displeased with David (2 Sam. 11:27b), Nathan gives God's adverse judgement (2 Sam. 12:7–12), and David himself confesses that he has sinned against God (2 Sam. 12:13). Yet, the rest of the narrative that is commonly referred to as the Succession Narrative (SN) is less explicit. There are instances of apparent criticism, such as the contrast between David and Uriah in 2 Samuel 11:8–13. There are also verses which merely imply that David's behaviour is unacceptable, such as 2 Samuel 11:1. However, overall it would appear that the SN shows David in a negative light.

With the seemingly unflattering presentation of David in the passage 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2,[2] it is no surprise that the genre of this body of work has been debated extensively. Some of the various genre categories to which the SN has been argued to belong are, national epic, propaganda, wisdom literature, theological 'history' writing, literary art, and *njals saga*. Furthermore, the nature of David's character has been a subject of debate within the genre argument. Surprisingly, the varying interpretations of David's character range from those that are ultimately complimentary despite David's sins, those that are neutral with respect to his character and interpretations that are highly critical of David's behaviour.

1 McKenzie writes that the author of Chronicles was most likely a priest who was interested in documenting the building of the Temple, and the development of the institutions which were associated with the Temple. McKenzie argues that the author of Chronicles did not document David's transgressions, as they were not the focus of his writing, and to do so would tarnish the reputation of the Temple. Steven McKenzie, *King David. A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36.

2 This narrative is usually called the Succession Narrative.

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The following section discusses the different competing views of the genre of the SN, and the varied conceptions of King David and his family within these different genre categorisations of the SN. In section 1.2 I argue that the genre of the SN is satire and that the narrative is pejoratively critical of David.

1.1 The Genre Debate

The argument for the existence of a unified narrative beginning in the Second Book of Samuel through to the beginning of the First Book of Kings has a long history. As early as 1878 Wellhausen proposed that the narrative 2 Samuel 9–2 Kings 2[3] was a single body of work which documented Solomon's colourful rise to the throne.

Leonhard Rost's dissertation of 1926, *The Succession to the Throne of David,* builds on this theory. Rost argues that the passage 2 Samuel 9–1 Kings 1–2 is a single authored narrative, by proposing that it is part of a self-contained unit which also includes the Ark Narrative (1 Sam. 4:1b–18a, 19–21; 5:1–11ba, 12; 6:1ba, 4, 10–14, 16; 6:19–7:1; 2 Sam. 6:1–15), and the Prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam. 7:1–7, 11b, 16; 18–21, 25, (26), 27–29).[4] Rost's major contribution to scholarship proved to be his detailed analysis of the content and style of the passage 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2, which he called the "Succession Narrative." Rost suggests that there is a uniform structure which links the narrative throughout 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2.[5] Rost argues that by and large the content and style of the text are consistent throughout the narrative suggesting the unity of the source.[6] However, he also argues that the material on the Ammonite war (2 Sam. 10:6–11:1; 12:26–31) is from a separate source.

Both Wellhausen[7] and Rost see the focus of the content in this narrative as the succession to the throne of King David.[8] However, Rost maintains that it is the content which establishes the boundaries of the narrative. He argues that the material in 1 Kings 1–2 provides the conclusion to Solomon's accession to the throne, 2 Samuel 10–12 provides Solomon's background story, and

3 In *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* Wellhausen writes that the end of this narrative is 2 Kings 2 (262). However, it would appear that this is a typographical error given that it is not consistent with the context of Wellhausen's discussion. I have come to this conclusion in consultation with Dr. Suzanne Boorer.

4 Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, 84.

5 Ibid., 67.

6 Ibid., 68.

7 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 262.

8 Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, 84.

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2 Samuel 9:13:1–20:22 gives the background story of the succession.[9] Rost also suggests that theological consistency is found in the SN by the representation of Yahweh as the guardian of the moral law who requires submission from human beings, and who expresses himself indirectly in worldly events.[10]

The other emphasis of Rost's dissertation is the identification of unity in the text through a consistency of style. He criticizes previous research which identified the unity of texts based only on consistency of vocabulary and thought-content. Rost suggests that these findings are open to debate; as shared vocabulary and shared thoughts might be found in groups of people within the same sphere of influence, and thereby, consistency may not point to a work being written by a single author.[11] Instead, Rost proposes that although different writers may use the same traditional or learned literary conventions, style is highly idiosyncratic and creative. Rost writes that a single style can be determined by concise vs. expansive writing, a particular use of speech in a narrative, and the way an author chooses to tell a lengthy story (in a seamless block or as smaller stories which are rounded off within a larger narrative).[12] Rost highlights the difference in style in the work of the Ark Narrative (1 Sam. 4:1b–18a, 19–21; 5:1–11ba, 12; 6:1ba, 4, 10–14, 16; 6:19–7:1; 2 Sam. 6:1–15) the Prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam. 7:1–7, 11b, 16; 18–21, 25, (26), 27–29), the Ammonite Wars (2 Sam. 10:6–11:1; 12:26–31), and the remaining narrative in 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2, to suggest how these works were authored by different people.

Although Rost does not write in detail about the genre of the text he claims that the SN was written by a member of the royal court,[13] and is a highly stylized account of history.[14] At this stage in the discussion scholars generally agree that the narrative 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2 is a single authored work which was written in order to record the details of Solomon's rise to the throne. However, scholars were yet to strictly define genre. As mentioned, Wellhausen suggests that the style of writing in 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2 is different from other biblical passages which contain fanciful representations of events and is more inclined to 'historical writing.' On the other hand, while Luther,[15]

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 108.

11 Ibid., 3.

12 Ibid., 4.

13 Ibid., 105.

14 Ibid., 104.

15 Bernhard Luther, "The Novella of Judah and Tamar and Other Israelite Novellas," In *Narrative and Novella in Samuel. Studies by Hugo Gressmann and Other Scholars 1906–1923*, edited by David M. Gunn, translated by David E. Orton, 177–206. Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1991. German original, "Die Novelle von Juda und Tamar und andere

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Caspari,[16] Gressmann[17] and Schulz[18] all agree that the material in the books of Second Samuel and First Kings contains historical information, nevertheless they interpret the genre of this narrative as having more in common with novelistic writing. Rost's detailed literary analysis of the SN does not firmly indicate a particular genre.

After the early history of scholarship into the material in the SN, scholars began to make clearer suggestions regarding the genre of the narrative, or spoke of a distinct focus in the narrative which implied a particular genre. In these studies the categories of genre can loosely be grouped under the following headings; National Epic, Political Propaganda, Wisdom Writing, Theological 'History' Writing, Literary Art, and *Njals Saga*. Each of these descriptive headings considered on its own is imprecise as it is generally considered that the SN is based on actual historical events, has a theological function, and shows evidence of literary artistry. That is, the SN has key features of multiple genres and, as such, manifests genre overlap. However, consistent with this overlap of genre, it can reasonably be argued that the SN has a dominant focus, and therefore, is a better exemplar of one of these genres than of others.

In the 1940's and 1950's a clear statement and analysis of the genre of SN was yet to emerge. However, a group of scholars wrote succinctly of the narrative 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2 as a national epic.[19] This interpretation extended the view of the SN as 'history writing' but emphasized the author's intention

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israelitische Novellen." In Eduard Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme*. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1906.

16 Wilhelm Caspari, "The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Sam 15–20." In *Narrative and Novella in Samuel. Studies by Hugo Gressmann and Other Scholars 1906–1923*, edited by David M. Gunn, translated by David E. Orton, 59–88. Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1991. German original, "Literarische Art und Historischer Wert von 2 Sam. 15–20." In *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 82 (1906) 317–348.

17 Hugo Gressmann, "The Oldest History Writing in Israel." In *Narrative and Novella in Samuel. Studies by Hugo Gressmann and Other Scholars 1906–1923*, edited by David M. Gunn, translated by David E. Orton, 9–32. Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1991. Original date of publication 1910.

18 Alfons Schulz, "Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel." In *Narrative Art and Novella in Sam. Studies by Hugo Gressmann and Other Scholars 1906–1923*, edited by David M. Gunn, translated by David E. Orton, 120–121. Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1991. Original date of publication 1923.

19 Scholars of note include; Edmond Jacob, *Histoire et historiens dans l'ancien testament* (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1957), 29; William McKane, *I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 19 and Christopher R. North, *The Old Testament Interpretation of History* (London: The Epworth Press, 1953), 34. Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Adam and Charles Black Limited, 1952), 358.

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to document the great achievements of the community. Pfeiffer suggests that the author's only bias is his pride in the nation's achievements.[20]

A decade later a body of scholars began to speak of the SN as a work of political propaganda. Timothy Thornton argues that it was necessary for Solomon to justify his rise to the throne, given that he was not the first in line to be king, and because there were a number of controversial executions at the start of Solomon's reign, including Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei.[21] Harry Hoffner also argues that the SN is a work of political propaganda.[22] Kyle McCarter builds on Hoffner's work when he claims that 1 Kings 1–2 is a court apology for Solomon and David.[23] He suggests that questions of Solomon's legitimacy to take the throne must have circulated in the community at the time, and as a result, 1 Kings 1–2 (which vindicated Solomon) was written.[24] Keith Whitelam suggests that the depiction of David in the stories known as David's rise and the narrative in the SN is a work of royal propaganda. Whitelam argues that it was necessary to manipulate the story of David in order to show that his kingdom was stable, to protect it from threats, and to justify his usurpation of Saul's throne.[25]

Whybray suggests that the SN[26] was written at a time of 'enlightenment' when Israel was influenced by the wisdom tradition of its neighbours,[27] and when foreign scribes would have taught at similar schools in Israel.[28] Such a proposition then leads Whybray to conclude that the author of the SN chose to use a historical subject in order to teach the students wisdom, about the real-life situation that they would find themselves working within.[29]

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20 Ibid.

21 Timothy C. G. Thornton, "Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings," *CQR*, 169 [371] (1968), 159–166, 161.

22 "Propaganda and Political Justification in Hittite Historiography," in, H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts, eds., *Unity and Diversity Essays in the History Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (London: John Hopkins, 1975), 49–62 as cited in, P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "Plots, True and False." The Succession Narrative as Court Apology," *Int* 35 4 (1981), 355–367, 358.

23 McCarter Jr., "Plots, True or False." The Succession Narrative as Court Apology," 357.

24 Ibid., 360.

25 Keith W. Whitelam, "The Defence of David," *JSOT*, 29 (1984), 61–87, 62.

26 Whybray generally agrees that the narrative from 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2 is a single authored body of work. However, he suggests that 2 Samuel 10:1–11:1a and 12:26–31 are separate war annals; 2 Samuel 12:7b–10, 11f, 13b–14 are repetitious and therefore suspicious, and that 1 Kings 2b:4, and 27 are not original. Ibid., 8–9.

27 Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kgs 1 and 2*, 1 & 7.

28 Ibid., 56.

29 Ibid., 80.

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In the 1940's Von Rad suggests that the genre, of what would later be called the SN, was a kind of theological history writing.[30] In the 1970's Walter Brueggemann also suggests that the genre of the SN is historical/theological writing. In particular he maintains that the theme of succession in 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2 is theologically significant as it emphasises the working out of Yahweh's promise to David, and Israel.[31]

Contrary to this, Otto Eissfeldt favours the view that the SN is literary art. He argues that the SN outlines historical events, but does so in a way that is artistically crafted.[32] He proposes that the SN cannot be called history writing, as it does not document events as annals might, but rather presents events in a deliberate manner with much fictitious ornamentation.[33] Gunn builds on these ideas by suggesting that the material in the SN is primarily a work of art and an entertaining story.[34] He argues that this story is traditional in nature, drawing on motifs found in the OT and in other literature. Furthermore, Gunn argues that all of these motifs have a literary purpose. He suggests that these traditional motifs may have some basis in historical fact, but that the narrative neglects historical reporting in favour of creating an entertaining story.[35]

Gunn also suggests that there are passages within the SN that have improbable 'historical' similarities, including; 2 Samuel 16:1 and 1 Samuel 15:18, where the gifts of food are striking,[36] and 2 Samuel 18:6–7, which has similarities to other stories in Samuel.[37] The implication is then, that these stories are literary fiction. Gunn therefore, concludes that this work finds its origins both in history and the oral tradition of story-telling—a tradition that used these literary patterns to provide artistic flair to the material. The highly crafted nature of

30 Gerhard von Rad, "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel," in *From Genesis to Chronicles. Explorations in Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 125–126. German original, Von Rad 'Der Anfang der Geschichtsscherib ung im alten Israel' *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte,* 32 (1944), 1–42.

31 Walter Brueggemann, "On Trust and Freedom: A Study of Faith in the Succession Narrative," *Int,* 26 (1972), 3–19, 4.

32 Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 143.

33 Ibid., 48.

34 Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*, 13. Although Gunn does use the term 'Succession Narrative,' it is worth noting that he does not believe that Solomon's ascension is the primary focus of this narrative; indeed, Gunn writes that Solomon is scarcely mentioned in the narrative. Instead Gunn views this as a narrative, where David is the protagonist of the story. 82.

35 Ibid., 49.

36 Ibid., 50.

37 Ibid., 51.

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the narrative and the important story encourages Gunn to call the narrative serious entertainment.[38]

Van Seters makes the argument that the material in the SN (or what he calls the David Saga)[39] is akin to *Njals sagas*, which are a particular form of Icelandic family sagas.[40] He maintains that these sagas are a fictitious account of history.[41] Yet, Van Seters also suggests that these sagas go towards creating a national identity, albeit a 'truer' account of history, which subverts or satirizes the corruptions of the past.[42]

Van Seters prefers the title David Saga as he suggests that the theme of succession is a sub-theme within a wider narrative which presents David's entire public life, beginning with his rise to power, and only ending with a new king rising to the throne.[43] David's Saga, Van Seters suggests, is a parody of an earlier Deuteronomistic document, which was a favourable account of David's reign.[44]

Furthermore, Van Seters suggests that the Deuteronomistic History of David, which presents David as a just and righteous king, is subverted in the David Saga, where David is shown to be anything but a model ruler.[45] Instead, he argues that David is shown to be congruent with the worst Kings in Israel's history including; Ahab, Jeroboam, and Saul.[46] Consequently, Yahweh makes a judgement over the entire Davidic dynasty.[47] Van Seters argues that the David Saga parodies the divine promise of the everlasting Davidic kingship, because it portrays David as a king who took the throne.[48] He then suggests that the over-arching question that arises in this text is: "Is this what you really want?"[49] This question, Van Seters interprets as anti-monarchical and anti-messianic.

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38 Ibid., 61.

39 Van Seters does not speak of the SN but rather the David Saga. In terms of the boundaries of this work, he includes the boundaries of Rost's thesis, but also adds 2 Samuel 2:8–4:12, and 2 Samuel 1:5–10 and 13–16. Furthermore, Van Seters uses the designation "Court History" instead of SN as Van Seters believes that there is less of a focus on the theme of succession than Rost claims. John Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

40 Ibid., 42.

41 Ibid., 42.

42 Ibid., 354–355.

43 Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David*, 331.

44 Ibid., 2.

45 Ibid., 291.

46 Ibid., 343.

47 Ibid., 299.

48 Ibid., 357.

49 Ibid., 358.

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1.2 The Succession Narrative as Satire?

I claim that the genre of the SN is a satire (in addition to being an historical account with a theological function). This line of research has emerged from two different lines of inquiry. In the first instance, I have been influenced by the body of research which considers the SN to be a work of literary art. The second line of inquiry has been my own research into irony in the SN. In terms of the first line of inquiry, I am most interested in Van Seters' research that has built on Gunn's claim that the SN is serious entertainment. Furthermore, Van Seters' suggestion that the 'David Saga' is a parodying work that subverts earlier ideas, themes and traditions[50] seems to align well with the suggestion that the SN is a satire. This suggestion is particularly evident in Van Seters' remark,

> … there is a stratum within the story of David that reflects an attempt to 'demythologize the tradition' that is similar to what is evident in the *Njals saga*. This stratum, which is reflected in the so-called Court History, presents a complete subversion of the older idealized David in DtrH and a parody of many of its major themes, and it does so by means of the same artistic qualities of character portrayal and 'realistic' recreation of the past that one finds in *Njals sagas*.[51]

In considering the David Saga as akin to *Njals sagas* Van Seters has focused on six major features of *Njals sagas*. The six features are as follows: (1) the focus is on the rivalries and feuds of founding families; (2) the *sagas* are based on earlier historical records; (3) the author stresses chronology, genealogy, place names, and memorial markers; (4) the story makes a judgement about the nation's past that has implications for the future; (5) the work complies with literary conventions and (6) it is possible (but not always the case) that these sagas are parodies.[52] It would appear that this set of features fits quite well with the SN. Nevertheless, I suggest that the genre of satire is a better fit. Indeed, as already stated, in this work I argue in detail that the SN meets a received definition of satire and, therefore, should be regarded as satire.

Satire, of course, may include some *Njals sagas*, however, *Njals sagas* are not always satirical.[53] Icelandic sagas also appear to have a geographical and historical specificity as opposed to the more universal genre of satire. Moreover,

50 Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David*, 354–355.
51 Ibid., 48.
52 Ibid., 49.
53 Ibid.

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by contrast with a work belonging to the genre of satire, a work belonging to the genre of *Njals sagas* would not necessarily have a pervasive sense of irony (as the SN does) and comply with the literary conventions of irony, rhetorical devices, distortions, grotesqueries etc. For these reasons, I suggest that the SN is more appropriately regarded as belonging to the genre of satire than that of Njals saga.

The second line of inquiry which led me to suspect that the SN is a work of satire is my own research into irony in the SN.[54] This line of research was largely inspired by Harold Bloom's work, *The Book of J*. Bloom argues that the author, J, was a woman who lived or worked near King Rehoboam (Solomon's son). Most notably, Bloom argues that the author J was an ironist. Furthermore, he mentions that there is considerable "social irony" in the Second Book of Samuel that is not easily categorized and is best thought of as unique to J (but in the style which we have come to know through Kafka).[55] Bloom's claim is supported by my own research which suggests that the SN has a pervasive sense of irony. However, I argue that the author of the SN is an ironist and a satirist, since irony is an essential element of satire.[56] By contrast Bloom argues that "the book of J" does not conform to any genre, and is not a moral document.[57] In the following sections I discuss satire and the features of satire[58] that are present in the SN. This process begins with a brief account of the history of satire.

1.2.1 *What Is Satire?*

1.2.1.1 History of Satire

The word satire is derived from the Latin word *satura* which has come to mean brimming with a variety of different things. Gilbert Highet likens the word

54 Ingram, "David Remains in Jerusalem and Absalom Flees to Geshur: An Ironic Interpretation," and "The Kindness of Irony: A Psychological Look at Irony in 2 Samuel 11."

55 Harold Bloom, *The Book of J* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 4–24.

56 See also, Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1992), 195. Jemielity is another scholar who interprets biblical texts satirically. However, he only touches upon the suggestion that the Davidic narratives contain satire. Jemielity suggests that the pervasiveness of shame in the Hebrew Bible is tantamount to the ridiculing aspect of satire (particularly as shame presents with judgements) (22–24). In reference to the Succession Narrative shame is found in the case of Ahithophel's suicide (2 Sam. 16:23–17:23) (32) and in the case of Nathan's judgement against David (2 Sam. 11:27–12:13) (38). Jemielity suggests that the latter case is an example of the Hebrew prophet as satirist (85). He also identifies dissimulation in the self-indicting parable in 2 Sam. 12:1–14 (194).

57 Ibid., 13.

58 It is beyond the scope of this research project to give a full account of satire. Instead, this overview shares the points which are generally agreed upon by scholars, acknowledging that significant debate still exists in the scholarship of satire.

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satura to the metaphor of a stew, which is a single unit that is full of different elements. A stew is also rich and earthy as compared to a plate of fine dining, which is sophisticated yet sparse, indicating that satire is coarse and varied.[59]

As the word satire was a Roman invention,[60] the earliest satirist is sometimes spoken of as Horace (65–8 BCE). However, satiric elements can be discerned much earlier[61] in Aristophanes (446–386 BCE) Old Comedy in Greece,[62] the *maqama* tradition in semitic Gadara,[63] and as early as (2025–1700 BCE) in Egypt with *The Satire of the Trades.*[64] Robert Elliot even proposes that the origins of satire were found in ancient curses. "Even today … we speak of satire as "venomous," "cutting," and "stinging,"… Our language preserves the memory of a once-powerful belief: Archilochus' [680–635 BCE] verses had demonic power and his satire killed."[65] Elliot linked this belief in the power of words to kill, with a belief in magic.[66] Of note to this research project is Elliot's suggestion that the understanding of 'satire' as deadly magic had transformed into emotional insult by the time of David. He writes that the Arabic *hija* (which Elliot calls satire) was a curse that tribal poets would hurl at each other before a battle. This he contends morphed into bragging, as is demonstrated in the preliminary banter between David and Goliath.[67] Notwithstanding this, it is tempting to suggest that the words which were exchanged between David and Goliath were more than bragging. For instance, Goliath speaks of cursing David (1 Sam. 17:43) and David might be seen to evoke the power of the Lord of Hosts (1 Sam. 45–47). Either way, as Elliot mentions, whether this exchange

59 Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 231.

60 Ibid., 24.

61 It is worth noting that a solid body of scholarship has argued that it is not anachronistic to apply the work 'satire' to biblical texts. The most conclusive article on this subject is: M. Perry, "Caution a Literary Text," *Ha-Shifrut.* 2/3 (1970), 608–663.

62 Theodore D. Kharpertian, "Thomas Pynchon and Postmodern Satire," in *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon* (London: Associated University Press, 1990), 25–27.

63 Moses Hadas, *Ancilla to Classical Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954). In the *maqama*, a performer uses prose and verse to infuse humour into a serious moral discourse. Menippus adopted this style he had learned in Gadara in what is now referred to as Menippean Satire.

64 Oudheden Van, Rijksmuseum. "The Satire of the Trades" (2025–1700 BCE), in *Encyclopedia of Disability*, ed. Gary L. Albrecht, vol. 4 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2006).

65 Robert C. Elliot, *The Power of Satire* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), 4.

66 Ibid., 6.

67 Ibid., 16.

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was seen to be a curse or hurtful invective, the commonality in both cases is the desire to harm the opposition, and to gain control over him or her.[68]

> The fear that satires created is well-documented. For instance, S. D. Goitein writes; Muhammad … is reported twice to have ordered the execution of such powerful female satirists, who were greatly dreaded by even such a powerful man as the head of the new Muslim State. This makes it clear why King Saul was so upset when the "dancing women" in their songs of triumph ascribed, or, as the Bible says, "gave" to David the slaying of ten thousands and to him only thousands, or why Barak refused to wage war against Sierra unless Deborah would accompany him. The biting satires of the woman judge, some of which were later included in the so-called song of Deborah (Judges 5) were a most effective means of activating the languid tribes. Prophetesses were consulted or dreaded, up to the very end of the Old-Israelite prophetism, if we may judge from the examples of Hulda, who was approached by King Josiah, and Noadya, who was obviously a great nuisance to Nehemiah, the Governor of Judea in Persian times, even though he was an energetic and rather ruthless man (Nehemiah 6:14).[69]

It appears that satiric forms were evident in different cultures (including the OT), throughout history. What is significant for this research is the identifying features of satire and the function of satire. An in-depth analysis of both of these aspects of satire will follow.

1.2.1.2 Identifying Satire

Satire presents in different forms. It may appear as a monologue, a parody of an existing work, a fictitious drama,[70] a biography,[71] or satire might present as history writing.[72] It may be of any length, however, if it is long, it will (in most cases) be episodic.[73] Thereby, a satire cannot be discerned purely by form, but must also be considered for content. Thus,

68 Ibid., 292.

69 S. D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs. Their Contacts Through the Ages* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 30, as cited in, Robert Elliot, *The Power of Satire*.

70 Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 14.

71 Ibid., 216.

72 Ibid., 213.

73 Ibid., 206.

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> When we speak of a satirical novel or a satirical play we probably have in mind a work of art which contains a sharp kind of irony or ridicule or even denunciation … in short, satire has to do with tone and spirit (perhaps also purpose), but hardly with form.[74]

Satire also has a discernible object of attack.[75] The targeted object is usually a political figure.[76] This prompts Highet to suggest that most satire is written of real people, and real-life situations, usually involving some kind of corruption which the satirist is railing against.[77]

Traditionally the targets of satire are presented in ways which are humiliating and debasing in order to strip them (metaphorically) of their social standing. Mathew Hogdart argues, "By using obscenity, the satirist can go even further, reducing man from nakedness to the condition of an animal, in which any claim to social or even divine distinction must appear even more ridiculous."[78] Other elements which may be present in a satire include "fantastic events,"[79] "distortions" (which commonly appear as exaggerations and understatements),[80] ridicule and parody, and "rhetorical features," which show that a work has been artistically crafted.[81] A satire might also use coarse, or obscene language, and revel in graphic and challenging descriptions of events.[82] However, irony is the most important, and most heavily utilised element in satire.[83] The constant use of irony sets up two different levels in a text; one that presents the situation as it appears to the object of the attack (namely, in a benign light), another that is pejoratively critical of the object of attack. This duality of levels represents the struggle between two different perspectives and these perspectives may be held by different factions within a society or, indeed, by different competing societies.[84] So, irony is essential to satire since it both sets up the two levels and forces the audience to make a judgement between the contrasting values embodied in these two different levels.[85]

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74 Elliot, *The Power of Satire*, 101.
75 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 224.
76 Matthew Hodgart, *Satire* (London: World University Library, 1969), 7.
77 Ibid., 16.
78 Hodgart, *Satire*, 30.
79 Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, 10.
80 Ibid., 11.
81 Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, 22.
82 Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 18.
83 Hodgart, *Satire*, 30.
84 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*, 224.
85 Ibid., 256.

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The form of irony definitive of satire is verbal irony. Moreover, the irony in instances of verbal irony is always intended. Therefore, the irony is not merely the unintended result of some conjunction of action and circumstance as in the well-known case of the pick-pocket whose own pocket is picked as he picks the pocket of others.[86] Furthermore, in satire it is necessary that there is evidence of a pervasive and pejoratively critical sense of verbal irony,[87] or in Northrop Frye's words, "militant irony."[88] However, upon saying this it is necessary to note that the study of satire is as diverse and unsettled as the study of irony. I accept the standard view of satire elaborated above, whilst acknowledging the extensive debate on the subject.

1.2.1.3 Function of Satire

Highet discusses two types of satirist which he calls the optimist and the pessimist. The optimist, Highet claims, likes people and hopes to cure them of their vices. The optimist uses frank and obscene words, however, he/she does this in order to shock an audience into facing the truth and in order to protest against injustices.[89] The pessimist on the other hand hates people, as he or she finds them to be incurably evil and foolish. The pessimist thereby, does not hope for the restoration of the world, but conversely hopes to destroy the world through his/her cruel words, and brutal sentences.[90] Thankfully, most scholars are less familiar with the dark-hearted satirist, and suggest that the primary function of satire is reform.

The satirist is not taken in by the hero of the epic rather the satirist sees through the smokescreen. Instead, the satirist will deflate the (seemingly) heroic in favour of presenting a truer version of events.[91] It might then be said that the optimistic satirist is an idealist at heart, who hopes that an ideal world will come about through his or her denunciation of vice, folly, and injustice.[92] The satirist is thereby, reformer,[93] teacher,[94] healer,[95] and artist.[96]

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86 D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 119–122.
87 Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, 13.
88 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*, 224.
89 Ibid., 19.
90 Ibid., 235.
91 Hodgart, *Satire*, 30.
92 Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 243. Dryden writes that; "The true end of satire, is the amendment of vices by correction," as cited in Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 241.
93 Ibid., 27.
94 Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 243.
95 Ibid., 236.
96 Hodgart, *Satire*, 20.

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1.2.2 *Summary*

An overview of satire appeared in section 1.2.1. I discussed the origins of satire and I pointed out that satire has a cutting and confrontational quality and is an ancient literary form found in different cultures. I argued that satire does not necessarily conform to a standard form. However, all satires have at least one object of ironic attack who is usually a political or religious figure. The object of attack is portrayed in a way that is humiliating in order to challenge his or her social position. I discussed the function of satire and claimed that satire is predominantly used in order to excite reform. I argued that the satirist hopes for a better world to emerge from the denunciation of injustices and other wrongdoing. I argued that the identifying features of satire are generally taken to be fantastic elements, distortions, ridicule, parody, rhetorical features and irony. Of all of these features, irony is the only feature that is essential to satire. However, the irony in satire must be pervasive and pejoratively critical. I claimed that the identification of the presence of pervasive critical irony, and the identification of some of the other features of satire in a narrative, along with an object of ironic attack, is sufficient to determine that the narrative in question is a satire. In this book I conclude that the features of satire are evident in the SN and that the SN is in fact a satire. Indeed, I make the first in-depth scholarly exploration of verbal irony in the SN. This exploration has the potential to advance understanding of the SN by opening up a fresh perspective, namely, that of the SN as satire.

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CHAPTER 2

Methodology and Irony

As already mentioned, the characteristic, indeed defining or essential, feature of satire is a pervasive sense of irony. Accordingly, I begin this chapter with a general discussion of irony before providing a detailed outline of the most influential theory of irony, namely, that of Douglas Muecke. It is Muecke's theory and taxonomy of irony, which I have adjusted, that I apply to the SN for the purpose of establishing that the SN is in fact possessed of a pervasive sense of irony and, therefore, ought to be understood as satire. (Or, at least, the SN ought to be so understood, given the presence of certain other elements of satire—see section 1.2.1.2. above.) The following sections (2.1.1.–2.1.3.) delve into the nature of irony in general terms, particularly as it relates to satire.

2.1 Irony

2.1.1 *Etymology*

Irony can be detected in history before the phenomenon was called irony.[1] However, the word irony originated in the Greek dramas which revolved around the characters of the *alazōn* and the *eirōn.* The *alazōn* was characterised as being full of pretence and ignorance, whereas the *eirōn* (who appeared to be ignorant) was actually the character with the greater insights who exposed the gaps in the *alazōn's* argument. The word irony is, therefore, derived from the Greek word *eironeia* (which is linked to the character of the *eirōn*), and is variously described as dissimulation, feigning ignorance, hiding under a false pretence, hypocrisy, and deception.[2]

2.1.2 *Function of Irony*

In its simplest form irony may be no more than a polite or witty expression. It would be a great stretch of the imagination to suggest that the comment "it's a great day today" on a miserable day is anything more than a light exchange about the weather. However, when irony is used in a sustained manner, the

1 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 14.

2 Douglas Harper (2008–2011) http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=irony&searchmode=none.

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function is to critique and reform society. Irony makes this change through the power of language. For example,

> Language makes possible the accumulation and transmission of culture, embodying and shaping that culture in the very process of transmission. Similarly, the formation of identity is at once made possible and radically circumscribed by the structures of language as a primary vehicle of socialization[3] … irony in narrative creates a linguistic matrix in which the imagination can function, and, therefore also a medium with which the community can interact with its tradition, evaluating and shaping its contents, and appropriating them for new and different circumstances.[4]

In other words, the evolution of society comes about by working through conflicting discourse and not out of thin air; the old way of thinking always lives next to the new way of thinking, as they are dependent upon each other. For instance, Wayne Booth speaks of irony as a reconstruction. He sees irony as pulling down an old dwelling place whilst it builds another one, overlooking the old site.[5] This process of rebuilding is always constructive as the higher purpose of irony is conceived of as just. For instance, historically, the higher purpose of irony was for Socrates a static sense of eternal love,[6] for Rorty the absence of cruelty,[7] and for Carolyn Sharp to get closer to God.[8] Edwin Good has suggested that the presence of irony is a criterion for "liberating faith."[9] Properly conducted ironic dialogue resolves the tension between two streams of thought in a way that is constructive for human beings and for society.

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3 Jerry Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark's Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 22.

4 Ibid., 33.

5 Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 36. From a scientific perspective, Hunt and Goleman suggest that active thought must be contingent on what has gone before as active thought relies on information which is stored in the long-term memory. Daniel Goleman, *Vital Lies, Simple Truth: The Psychology of Self Deception* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 55–90.

6 Plato 1963, 563 [211e], as cited in Colebrook, *Irony*, 31

7 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, xv.

8 Carolyn Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009).

9 Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), 245. Original date 1965.

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2.1.3 *Types of Irony*

Irony is a diverse and ever-changing phenomenon. Therefore, when we speak of irony in an academic sense it is important to be specific. It is generally agreed that there are two different categories of irony, and here I use Muecke's definitions of irony: observable irony and instrumental irony.[10] Observational irony involves a state of affairs that is seen to be ironic by the observer who is also the person being communicated to i.e. the reader or hearer.[11] However, there is no evidence of an ironist who is behind the scenes and who has intentionally presented the events as ironic in order to pejoratively criticise some person, group, idea etc. Dramatic irony is a species of observable irony. However, unlike some forms of observable irony, dramatic irony is primarily the irony of the theatre and like dramatic forms.

General irony[12] is another species of observable irony in that it presents ironic situations, however, in these cases the ironic content is universal in character and applies to all people. For instance, the irony of individual human beings apparently possessed of free will and a desire to lead meaningful lives finding themselves in a purposeless, deterministic universe. This kind of irony is typically philosophical or artistic.[13] However, as with other forms of observable irony, in general irony there is no ironist seeking to make a pejorative criticism.

Instrumental irony, on the other hand, is characterised by the presence of an ironist being intentionally ironical.[14] Verbal irony is the species of instrumental irony that is used in satire, and as such, is utilised in this book. Verbal irony is distinct because it contains an ironist who is being deliberately ironical, the presence of a specific object of ironic attack, and a corrective intent. It is intentional in as much as there is an object of attack. There is a corrective intent in as much as the object of attack is morally problematic yet potentially retrievable. If the object of attack is a person then the person is an object by virtue of having transgressed morally and yet the moral order can be restored,

10 Here I use the terms from Muecke's most recent work, *Irony and the Ironic*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 22–23.

11 In describing observable irony, Muecke gives the example of a pickpocket who has his pocket picked while he is in the process of going about his business of picking pockets. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 100.

12 Also spoken of as Ironies of Dilemma, Amiel's Law of Irony, Kierkegaard's World Irony, Cosmic Irony, and Romantic Irony. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 120, 147, 159.

13 Ibid., 119–122.

14 Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 22.

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at least potentially, by means of ironic discourse. As mentioned above this is the kind of irony that is found in satire. Frye speaks of irony that is found in satire as 'militant' irony. It is militant because it is confrontational and unrelenting. The purpose of this kind of irony is to make moral judgements and generate morally acceptable outcomes. The moral judgment of the ironist then becomes the standard against which the actions or features of the object of ironic attack are measured and found wanting.[15]

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 *The Essential Elements in Irony According to Muecke*

Muecke claims that there are three essential elements in all types of irony. They are as follows: two different levels in the narrative, an opposition between the levels, and the presence of 'innocence.' Muecke calls the different levels the "lower level" and the "upper level." The lower level is explicit and thus known to all participants, including the victim of irony (if there is a victim of irony). By contrast, the upper level is only implicit and, as such, not necessarily known to all participants. The lower level comprises the situation of the victim of the irony (if there is a victim), or the ironist's dissimulation (if there is an ironist). The upper level, on the other hand, is the situation as it is implied by the ironist.[16] Consider the example of a student who is bragging about his superior performance in an exam, not knowing that he has actually failed. The situation as it appears to the student comprises the lower level and, indeed, is known to all participants, namely, that he has sat the exam and that he is bragging about his performance. On the other hand, the upper level comprises the situation as it appears to the ironist and consists of the hubris of the student and the fact that the student has failed. The upper level does not need to be fully or unambiguously 'presented' by the ironist. It is sufficient if the ironist evokes the thought in the observer. It may be as simple as a hint that the ironist does not see the situation as it is presented in the lower level, e.g. as the student in our example sees it. At the upper level the ironist implies that the victim of the irony does not apprehend his or her situation completely, and that the ironist does not accept the situation as it is presented in the lower level as being correct or complete. At the upper level, therefore, the observer of the irony is aware that the contradiction that he or she perceives is not recognised

15 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*, 223.
16 Ibid., 19.

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by the victim of the irony.[17] By discussing irony in terms of two different stratified levels, the upper level (the implicit level) and the lower level (the explicit level), Muecke is suggesting that the ironist and the observer at the upper level are superior to the victim of irony at the lower level.[18]

The second element which is essential to all irony is an opposition between the levels. The opposition Muecke speaks of need only be an incongruity, contradiction or an incompatibility. This is usually the opposition between the explicit and the implicit, between what is said and what is meant, and between what the victim thinks or does and what the observer knows and expects of the victim.[19] However, it is important to note the incongruity must be understood in a wide sense that includes inappropriate or unexpected comments rather than merely in the narrow sense that limits it to contradictory statements or incompatible events. Only the definition in the wide sense can account for overstatements and understatements since these rely on incongruencies that are a matter of degree, such as exaggeration, rather than absolute contradictions.

I reiterate that there need not be an ironist, i.e. someone intending the irony. Consider, for example, a tiger running down a street in Melbourne shortly after someone had confidently asserted that there are no tigers in Melbourne. Here the irony arises from the two events (the assertion followed by the arrival of the tiger), or in other words, no-one intends the irony. This is not the case in verbal irony, however.

The third element is 'innocence'. Here we need to be careful. As we have just seen there may not be an ironist. However, if there is one then the ironist always pretends to be innocent with respect to the ironic content. On the other hand, if there is no ironist, as in our tiger example, then there must be a victim of irony in Muecke's sense of a person who is confidently unaware of the irony. Of course, there can be both an ironist and a victim of irony. Suppose in our above exam example that the examiner—knowing what the student does not yet know, namely, that he has failed the exam—says to the boastful student that his performance exceeded expectations. Here the examiner is the ironist and is feigning ignorance by pretending to endorse the student's high opinion of himself but is implicitly disparaging the student. The student is the unknowing victim since he is confidently unaware of the irony. The content of the irony arises from the opposition between the student's boasts and the

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 29.

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reality of his failure. Here I note that the victim may be possessed of confident ignorance without necessarily being boastful.[20]

At this point I diverge somewhat from Muecke's account. Firstly, there is a need to distinguish, as Muecke does not always do, between the feigned ignorance of the ironist (e.g. the examiner in the above exam scenario) and the actual ignorance of the victim (e.g. the student). Hence, contrary to what Muecke says, in sarcasm and overt irony the ironist feigns innocence, albeit there is typically no victim of irony since the person who is the object of the disparaging remarks is immediately aware of this.[21] This brings me to a second point of divergence with Muecke. There is a need to distinguish, as Muecke does not always do, between the victim of irony—in the sense of the person who is confidently unaware of the irony—and the object of ironic attack.[22] Of course, in many instances of irony there is no object of ironic attack. However, in the category of irony of most interest to me, namely, verbal irony (see below) there is always an object of ironic attack. The object of ironic attack is always someone or something that is the object of pejorative criticism. In the above exam scenario, it is the boastful student. In the case of sarcasm it is the person about whom the disparaging remark is made. Notice that the victim of irony is not necessarily the object of ironic attack. In our exam scenario, the student is both the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim. But suppose the boastful student's mother is present when the examiner says that his performance exceeded expectations and she suggests that a celebration is in order for her brilliant child. The mother is a victim since she has entirely missed the irony of the examiner's remark because she is understandably preoccupied with her son and his supposed achievement; but she is not the object of the examiner's disparaging attack.

All of the examples of verbal irony spoken of in this book are examples of simple irony. Simple irony is characterised by a conflict between the two levels.[23]

2.2.2 *The Elements of Verbal Irony*

Thus far the discussion on irony has focused on the three elements which Muecke suggests are essential to all types of irony. The following discussion will concentrate on the elements characteristic of verbal irony—the irony to be found in satire. Muecke suggests that verbal irony is characterised by the

20 Ibid., 29.
21 Ibid., 20.
22 Ibid., 34–39.
23 Ibid., 20

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presence of an ironist who is intentionally being ironical. This is in contrast to observable irony where it is "a condition of affairs" or "outcome of events." Here we need to keep in mind the threefold distinction made above between the feigned innocence of the ironist, the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of irony. As mentioned above, Muecke conflates the object of attack with the unknowing victim. Nevertheless, consistent with what Muecke says, the object of ironic attack can be something general and impersonal, such as an entire philosophical system, or it may be personal and specific, such as a particular person, e.g. David.[24] On the other hand, victims of irony are always persons, i.e. beings capable of knowing.

Let me stress at the outset that, as Muecke points out, verbal irony always involves an ironist, an intended irony and an object of ironic attack—someone or something that is pejoratively criticised. Moreover, the ironist not only intends the irony but also intends the attack. Further, the ironist always engages in feigned innocence. However, there is not always an unknowing victim of irony, although there frequently is. In the SN, for example, David is sometimes the object of ironic attack without being the unknowing victim of the irony.

As just mentioned, verbal irony always involves an ironist who intends the irony, however the ironist is not necessarily a character in the narrative. The ironist can also be a narrator (whether understood as the author or not) or, indeed, the author him/herself qua author. Moreover, in the case of impersonal irony the author as ironist communicates the irony via the characters and events. So, the persona of the author is manifest in the speech and actions of the characters and/or in the presentation of events. Thus, as Muecke points out, an inherently humorous event might be narrated by the author in a grave and detached tone.

Verbal irony is used in satire in order to challenge a point of view or expose folly, hypocrisy or vanity.[25] However, as already mentioned, verbal irony can involve a direct opposition between what is said and what is meant, or the intended meaning may present as a subtle suspicion that everything is not what it seems. Given these differences, verbal irony is divided into different grades depending on how apparent the irony is. The three grades of irony which Muecke speaks of are: Overt, Covert, and Private Irony.[26]

24 Ibid., 34.
25 Ibid., 232.
26 Ibid., 53.

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(1) Overt irony is immediately apparent, and is not ambiguous.[27]

(2) Covert irony is ambiguous and needs to be uncovered.[28] Most of the irony in the SN is of this grade. An awareness that the author's opinion or line of argument contradicts the context within which the opinion or line of argument is presented suggests covert irony. Covert irony can be found in the 'whole' context in the following ways:

  (a) "What we already know about the writer and the subject."

  (b) "What the writer tells us about himself and the subject over and above his pretended meaning."

  (c) "What we are told by the way in which he expresses his opinion, presents his case, or conducts his argument. That is to say, what is ostensibly said may be contradicted or qualified by:"

    1 "Our prior knowledge as to,"

      (a) "It's truth eg. 'Hitler was kind to Jews,' and/or,"

      (b) "The author's real opinion, eg. 'God is good,' said by an atheist, and / or,"

      (c) "The author's real character, if he presents himself as other than he is,"

    and additionally, or alternatively by:

    2 "What the author says or implies over and above what he seems to be saying. This internal contradiction may be,

      (a) "A contradiction of facts or opinions,"

      (b) "A logical contradiction"

      (c) "A discordant tone in speaking or,"

      (d) "Any discrepancy between what is said and the language in which it is expressed, eg. unsuitable metaphor or choice of words, or"[29]

      (e) "Any discrepancy between what is ostensibly said and what is revealed of the author's real character"[30]

(3) Private irony, (which will not be discussed in this dissertation) is irony which is known only to the ironist.[31]

27 Ibid., 55.
28 Ibid., 57.
29 Ibid., 58.
30 Ibid., 59.
31 Ibid., 59.

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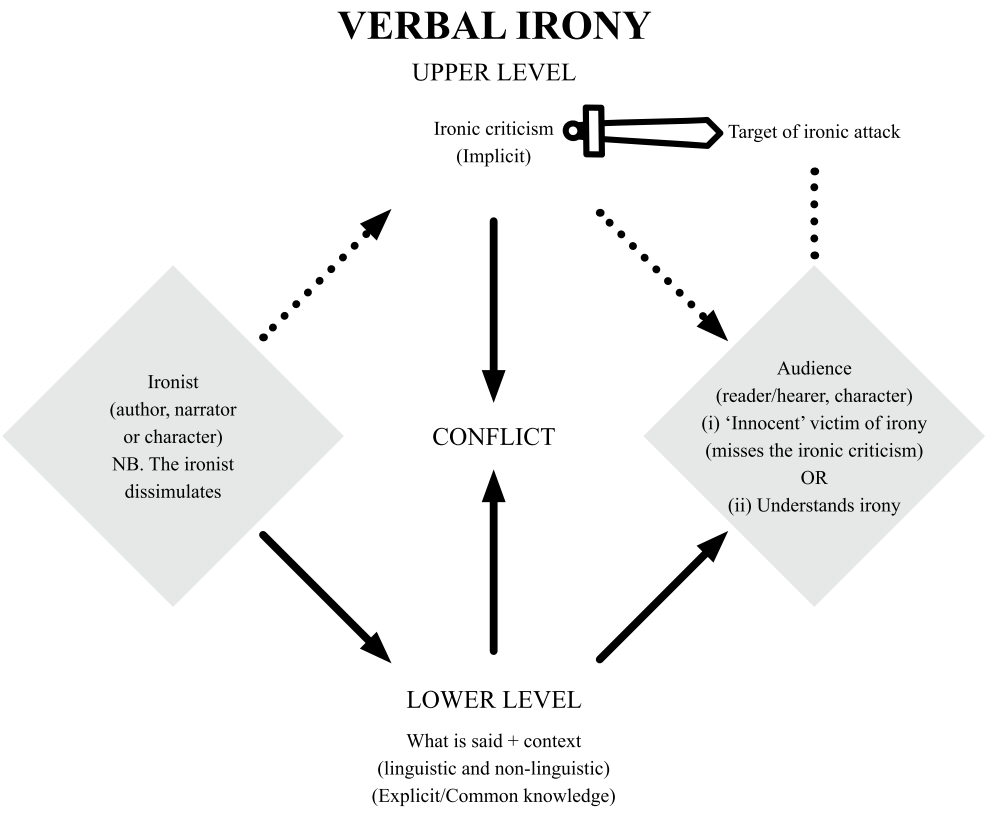
2.2.3 *Diagram of Verbal Irony*



In addition to the three grades of irony, discussed above, Muecke argues for four modes of irony. The four modes concern the different possible presentations of the ironist. The four modes are outlined in section 2.2.4.

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2.2.4 *Table of the Four Modes of Verbal Irony*[32]

(1) IMPERSONAL IRONY –THE IRONIST IS EITHER AUTHOR, NARRATOR, OR CHARACTER
Impersonal irony is irony which does not have a particular character in the narrative who is the ironist, as Socrates is in Plato's plays. Instead, in cases of Impersonal Irony the reader is aware of an ironist within the text as an authorial *'persona.'*

SUB-CATEGORIES OF IMPERSONAL IRONY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

(1) Praising in Order to Blame—Including; praise for qualities known to be lacking, praise for having undesirable qualities or for lacking desirable qualities, or inappropriate or irrelevant praise.
(2) Blaming in Order to Praise—Including blame for undesirable qualities known to be lacking, blame for having desirable qualities or for lacking undesirable qualities, or inappropriate or irrelevant blame.
(3) Pretended Agreement with the Victim
(4) Pretended Advice or Encouragement to the Victim
(5) The Rhetorical Question
(6) Pretended Doubt
(7) Pretended Error or Ignorance
(8) Innuendo or Insinuation
(9) Irony by Analogy
(10) Ambiguity
(11) Pretended Omission of Censure
(12) Pretended Attack upon the Victim's Opponent
(13) Pretended Defence of the Victim
(14) Misrepresentation, or False Statement
(15) Internal Contradiction
(16) Fallacious Reasoning
(17) Stylistically Signally Irony—Including; the ironical manner, stylistic placing, parody, mock-heroic, burlesque and travesty.
(18) Understatement
(19) Overstatement
(20) Irony Displayed—This is similar to Observable Irony; however, it can be distinguished by the identification of the ironist being ironical, or critical in the arrangement of events

(2) SELF-DISPARAGING IRONY
(3) *INGÉNUE IRONY*—THE PRESENCE OF A TRUE INNOCENT
(4) DRAMATIZED IRONY—EVENTS ARE DELIBERATELY ARRANGED TO BRING OUT THE IRONY

2.2.5 *Notes Regarding the Four Modes of Irony*

"Self-Disparaging Irony" can be detected when the ironist is present in the narrative as a person.[33] This type of irony does not present in the SN. *Ingénue* irony presents when a true innocent is apparent, instead of a person who is

32 Ibid., 55–92.
33 Ibid., 87.

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dissimulating.[34] In this type of irony the ironist withdraws further, and instead of feigning innocence uses a true innocent or an *ingenui* to expose the truth.[35] The child in the story of the emperor's new clothes is a good example of a true innocent.

Of special note are the similarities between "Irony Displayed" and "Dramatized Irony." Both of these types of irony use events that are deliberately arranged to bring out the irony. The difference, as mentioned by Muecke, is that the ironist in Irony Displayed feigns detachment, and is motivated by contempt. Whereas, the ironist in Dramatized Irony really is detached and does not pretend to be earnest while he or she is being contemptuous. Instead, the ironist accepts the irony for what it is, and is less outraged than the ironist in Irony Displayed. For instance, "But we are more likely to find an Impersonal Ironist using irony to satirize, say, vanity, hypocrisy, and rationalizing, and more likely to find a Dramatizing Ironist looking upon manifestations of vanity, hypocrisy, and rationalizing as being in themselves instances of irony and content simply to present them as such."[36] This mode of irony does not present in the SN.

Also of note, in concluding this section it is necessary to mention that Muecke is certain that his list is incomplete and that every instance of irony presents in a unique manner which requires flexibility in interpretation.[37]

2.3 Verbal Irony and the Succession Narrative

In this book I apply Muecke's generic definition of irony, and the specific grades, modes, and sub-categories of verbal irony to a sequential reading of the final form of the SN. The dominant grade of irony in the SN is covert. I do not mention private irony, since discerning this grade of irony presupposes an extent of knowledge of the author not available in the case of SN. The dominant mode of irony in the SN is impersonal irony since in the SN there is not a distinct character who is a consistent ironical personality throughout the text. There is evidence in the SN of most of the sub-categories of impersonal irony. In cases of overlapping sub-categories of irony, instances of the dominant sub-category of irony are used to justify my claim that verbal irony is present.

34 Ibid., 91.
35 Ibid., 62.
36 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 93.
37 Ibid., 83.

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PART 2

Evidence

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CHAPTER 3

David's Sins and Punishments

The discussion of verbal irony in chapters 3–8 will concentrate on verbal irony as it appears in single verses or small groupings of verses. This analysis will include a discussion of the three essential elements of irony namely; (1) two different levels in the text, (2) an opposition between the levels, and (3) the presence of innocence. The element of innocence is always present in the ironist's dissimulation (where the ironist feigns innocence) and is present in the unknowing victim of the irony (if there is a victim). The victim of irony is a person who is "confidently unaware" of the irony, and not a person who is just deceived. Indeed, the victim of irony is typically an arrogant character who is confidently unaware of the incongruity in a situation.

I also include a discussion of those elements of verbal irony that are characteristic of satire. These include: the object of the ironic attack, and the identification of the grade and the mode of the irony. These latter categories will be applied systematically. For ease of reading the differences between some of the sub-categories of the modes of impersonal irony will be outlined repetitively up to the point at which it can be reasonably expected that the reader no longer needs this assistance.

Due to the vague and ambiguous nature of irony, including verbal irony, evidence of the verbal irony in the following sections will be stronger in some examples than in other examples. The examples for which the evidence is weaker are still included in this analysis in order to provide a reasonably comprehensive account. Another difficulty that arises from the vagueness and ambiguity of irony is the presence of over-lapping sub-categories of verbal irony. When this overlapping occurs the dominant sub-category is identified and other sub-categories ignored. Moreover, sometimes the vagueness and ambiguity of the concept of irony makes it difficult to identify an instance of verbal irony as belonging to one sub-category rather than another or to both. In the context of limitations of space, this has resulted in some instances of verbal irony being discussed under one sub-category at the expense of doing so under other possibly equally applicable sub-categories. This process is not ideal. Nevertheless, it is a process that identifies instances of verbal irony. Uncertainty with respect to which sub-category of verbal irony an instance of irony belongs is merely a residual matter.

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3.1 2 Samuel 9:1–13

3.1.1 *2 Samuel 9:1–10*

The lower level of the narrative is the situation as it appears to the victim of the irony, or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist, and may be spoken of as the explicit text. At the lower level of 9:1 David inquires if there is anybody left in the House of Saul to whom he may show kindness so that he might honour his relationship with Jonathan. Saul's servant, Ziba, is summoned, and informs David that Jonathan's crippled son is still living (9:2–3). David asks where Jonathan's son is and sends for him (9:4–5). Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, does obeisance to David and tells David that he is his servant (9:6). David tells Mephibosheth not to be afraid and that David will show חסד to Mephibosheth. Furthermore, David promises to restore all of Saul's land to Mephibosheth, and invites Mephibosheth to eat permanently at David's table (9:7). David then orders Ziba, Saul's servant, and his sons to be Mephibosheth's servants (9:9–10).

The upper level of the narrative is the situation as it appears to the ironist (be the ironist a character, the narrator or the author), and may be spoken of as the implicit message in the text. This need only be a hint that all is not what it seems in the lower level. At the upper level of this passage there is a hint that all is not what it seems as David's pledge of חסד appears to be overstated. Note, I interpret *hesed,* in this context, as covenant loyalty. The overstated mention of חסד is anomalous. Furthermore, the over emphasis on David's pledge of חסד draws attention to David's so-called pledge of חסד. It is more likely that David only offered חסד to Mephibosheth because it was in David's own interests to do so and not because he was doing goodwill to Mephibosheth or, strictly speaking, honouring a covenant he made with Jonathan (this will be discussed further below). The conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition—David says that he is showing חסד to Mephibosheth but in reality this is not the truth. Instead, David is making a display of showing חסד to Mephibosheth while David is 'honoring' a political covenant that he had previously made and did not want to honour. To look after any able-bodied kin members of Jonathan would be risky to David, considering there is evidence that David usurped the throne from Saul. An able-bodied kin member could, potentially, mount a revolt against David. At the lower level it appears as though David is showing חסד to Mephibosheth. However, in the upper level, the overstated mention of חסד implies an opposition in the narrative—that David is not showing חסד to Mephibosheth. The three mentions of the חסד in this passage, in context, are as follows.

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הכי יש־עוד אשׁר נותר לבית שׁאול ואעשׂה עמו חסד בעבור יהונתן (9:1)
(Is there anyone belonging to Saul's family left, to whom I might show *loyalty* for Jonathan's sake?)[1]

האפס עוד איש לבית שׁאול ואעשׂה עמו חסד אלהים (9:3)
(Is there no one left, belonging to Saul's family, for me to treat with God's own *loyalty?*)[2]

אל־תירא כי עשׂה אעשׂה עמך חסד בעבור יהונתן אביך (9:7)
(Do not be afraid; I will indeed treat you with *loyalty* for your father Jonathan's sake.)[3]

All three of these verses refer to the covenant that David made with Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:13–15 and that is repeated in 1 Samuel 20:42. In this everlasting covenant David and Jonathan agreed to preserve each other's family line. This is particularly salient not only for the bond of friendship that existed between Jonathan and David, but also because Jonathan could presume that David would take the throne (1 Sam. 20:31). Therefore, in this exchange Jonathan facilitates David's kingship at the expense of his own kingship, given that Jonathan is directly in line to succeed Saul. However, this exchange is not entirely unconditional as it appears that Jonathan has conceded the throne with the understanding that David will honour Saul's descendants—presumably because Jonathan was entitled to be king.

The connection to royal entitlement is conveyed in David's bequest of Saul's estate to Mephibosheth, complete with servants to maintain the estate, and the offer to Mephibosheth to eat at the king's table (9:7). Therefore, Mephibosheth will enjoy the privileges of his royal status,[4] which is in keeping with the covenant that David made with Jonathan.

At the lower lever it appears as though David is honouring the covenant he made with Jonathan. This is the view that is endorsed by Craig Morrison among others.[5] However, the overstatement of the concept of חסד implies that

1 Author's translation.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Antony F. Campbell, *2 Samuel* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans' Publishing Company, 2005), 89.
5 Craig E. Morrison, *Berit Olam. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry. 2 Samuel.* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013), 120, A. A. Anderson, *WBC, Vol. n. 2 Samuel* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1989), 143.

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David is not truly treating Mephibosheth with חסד. Instead, the חסד that David offers to Mephibosheth is tainted חסד. The notion of impropriety in the upper level is further implied by the suggestion that David had slaughtered everybody in the House of Saul (9:1;3). With this in mind, David's display of loyalty to Mephibosheth becomes suspicious. P. Kyle McCarter argues that Shimei's later claim that David slaughtered the Saulides (2 Sam. 16:7) adds suspicion to this scene. McCarter argues,

> It may be more than accidental, moreover, that the one male Saulide who survived the purge was lame. A man who was lame—or had any physical blemish—could not function as a priest (Lev 21:16–23). We are nowhere told that a blemish excluded a man from becoming king but in view of the sacrosanct character of the king's body (2 Sam 1:14) it seems most unlikely that a man "crippled in both legs" could have been regarded as a qualified candidate for the throne.[6]

Thereby, David honours the covenant with Jonathan in word but not in spirit, and as such David is the object of ironic attack. I note that the object of attack should be distinguished from the victim of irony. The victim of irony is sometimes also the object of attack. Arguably, David, who is the object of attack may also be the victim of irony if it can be demonstrated that he is confidently unaware of the irony. However, in this instance David is not the victim of irony as he is aware that he is not truly honouring the covenant he made with Jonathan. Therefore, the object of ironic attack is not necessarily the victim of irony. For the victim of irony could be a bystander, namely, a bystander who is confidently unaware of this irony.

The pejorative criticism in this passage concerns David's overstated assurance to honour Jonathan's covenant by showing loving kindness to his kin, in contrast with the upper level where it appears that David is keeping Mephibosheth under 'house arrest'.[7] David's ambivalence, if not hostility, towards Mephibosheth is also evident later in the narrative when David gives all of Mephibosheth's estate to Ziba on the basis of Ziba's mischievous claim (2 Sam. 16:1–4; 19:24–26).

The mode of irony, in this instance, is impersonal, as the ironist is not a character in the narrative. The grade of irony is covert as the intended meaning is not immediately apprehended. The irony is only apprehended by means of

6 P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel* (New York: Doubleday 1984), 265.

7 Robert Alter, *The David Story*, 243; Antony F. Campbell, *2 Samuel*, 91.

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knowledge of the background information just discussed and the anomaly in the language—the overstatement of חסד.

In this section the evidence of satire consists not only of the irony but also the coarseness characteristic of satire—notably, Mephibosheth's self-description as a "dead dog" (9:8). This comment was particularly vulgar in the Ancient Near East.[8]

3.1.2 *2 Samuel 9:10–13*

At the lower level (the explicit level) of 9:10–11 Ziba promises David that he and his large body of sons and servants will serve Mephibosheth as David has requested. Mephibosheth is said to eat at the king's table as the king's son would. It is also noted that Mephibosheth had a son named Micah. At the lower level of 9:13 it is said that Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem and always ate at the king's table, and that he was lame in his feet. At the upper level (the implicit level) of the narrative it is implied that David is not showing חסד to Mephibosheth. This implied message arises in the contrast between the description of the lavish treatment that is given to Mephiboseth (9:10–13a) and the final comment that Mephibosheth was lame in both of his feet (9:13b). Note, this contrast relies on the background knowledge that David hated cripples and that a man who was crippled could not be King of Israel.

This contrast is emphasized in the anomalous language in the text. Specifically, the language in 9:10–13a is verbose and the content of what is said overstated whereas the language in 9:13b is curt and the content of what is said curtly stated. This combination of overstated language and curt language has the effect of emphasizing the ironic exaggeration in the longer section and the damning information in the curt section. It is argued that when a prolix comment is combined with one which is curt, it is the shorter section which is emphasized, as the reader is compelled to give the second segment the same attention as he or she gives to the first section (pausing after reading each word). This slower reading adds emphasis to the curt section which contains the damning information. Furthermore, the anomaly of the verbose and curt sections is jarring to the reader who will in turn re-read the verbose section and notice the exaggeration in this section in addition to the brevity in the curt section—which is emphasized (this mode of irony is discussed further in 2 Sam. 11:1).[9] Therefore, the fact that Mephibosheth was lame in both of his feet is emphasized. This is significant as Mephibosheth's disability ensured that he

8 Craig E. Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 125.

9 Perry and Sternberg, 'The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process,' *Poetics Today.* Vol. 7, 2 (1986), 275–322.

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was not a threat to David. Therefore, David is able to make a display of honouring his covenant with Johnathan, but doing so in a manner that does not honour Johnathan's right to succession, as Mephibosheth could never be king, given his disability.[10]

Suspicion also arises when we consider David's view of the lame and blind as inferior. For instance, "David had said that day, "Whoever would strike down the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, those who David hates." Therefore, it is said, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house" (2 Sam 5:8). Given David's earlier statements can we really believe that he is well-disposed to Mephibosheth who is lame in both feet—or, in other words, very disabled?

The irony in this section is covert as it is not immediately apparent, and is only discerned with the benefit of background knowledge and by the anomaly in the presentation of facts—verbosity followed by curtness. The irony is impersonal and is an example of the sub-category of irony displayed. In particular, the events are displayed in a manner that is intended to be ironic, and there is a distinct 'contrast of incompatibles'. The contrast of incompatibles is between 9:10–13a, where David treats Mephibosheth exceptionally 'kindly', in contrast to 9:13b, where it is noted that Mephibosheth was lame in both feet (and is therefore hated by David). From the background material we know that David did not care for the disabled, and we can suspect that David did not care for Mephibosheth either, despite the message in the lower level of the narrative. We also suspect that the author has arranged the facts in such a way so as to imply a pejorative criticism of David.

The opposition in the narrative concerns the explicit message in the text, that David was exceptionally kind to Mephibosheth, in contrast to the implicit message in the text, that David hating the crippled and was only kind to Mephibosheth as David was calculating and self-serving. Therefore, David is the object of ironic attack. The innocence in the narrative is provided by the feigned ignorance of the narrator.

10 I note, although, Mephibosheth's son (and potential heir) Mica is mentioned (2 Sam. 9:12) there is no mention of what became of him. Indeed, there is no further mention of Mica in the entire Succession Narrative.

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3.2 2 Samuel 10:1–19

3.2.1 *2 Samuel 10:1–2*

At the lower level (or the explicit level) of the narrative it is reported that Hanun becomes the king of the Ammonites (10:1). David says that he will be loyal to Hanun to repay the loyalty that Hanun's father had shown to David. David then sends an envoy to Hanun to console him over his father's death (10:2).

At the upper level (or the implicit level) of the narrative the implication is that David is not going to show חסד to Hanun, or at least only tainted חסד to Hanun. This implication can be drawn from the discussion in the previous section where it is implied that the 'loyalty' that David extends to others is largely self-serving. Thereby, there is an implication that David has another motive for sending an envoy to Hanun, given that David is not concerned with consoling Hanun. The conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition. The explicit message that David is going to show loyalty and console Hanun is in direct opposition to the implicit message that David is going to wage war against Hanun and the Ammonites. This is somewhat confirmed by the response of the princes of the Ammonites (10:3). Their rhetorical questions are as follows:

> המכבר דוד את־אביך בעיניך כי־שלח לך מנחים
> (Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honouring your father?)[11]

> הלוא בעבור חקור את־העיר ולרגלה ולהפכה שלח דוד את־עבדיו אליך
> (Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?)[12]

Indeed, it would appear that Hanun and the princes of the Ammonites are so certain that David has sent spies to the city on a reconnaissance mission that they: (1) send David a clear message that they have seen through his ruse by exposing the men as spies and not diplomats (indeed, publicly humiliating them) (10:4), and (2) prepare for war (10:6).[13] The second point is stressed in the overstated preparation that the Ammonites make for war. Certainly, McCarter

11 Translation care of the *Revised Standard Version.*

12 Ibid.

13 The fact that the Ammonites prepare for war would seem to support the interpretation of "overthrow" rather than McCarter's interpretation of "to explore". P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel*, 270.

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argues that it is unlikely that the Ammonites had the resources to hire such a large army.[14]

David supplies the feigned innocence in the irony by suggesting that he is going to show loyalty to Hanun (10:2). It may also be suggested, that Hanun's father did not show loyalty to David, thereby creating a possible double opposition in David's remark. Indeed, there is no mention in the Bible of Nahash's loyalty to David. The implied message in this instance would be, "I will *not* deal loyally with Hanun, just as his father did *not* deal loyally with me." It is certainly true that the princes of the Ammonites could see no reason why David would deal loyally with them.

The irony is covert as it must be discerned from context, in this case, the context is David's lack of true חסד in the preceding chapter. The irony is impersonal and is either an example of an insinuation (in the instance of David's intention to wage war against the Ammonites) or an example of praising in order to blame. In the later example, David praises Hanun's father, when his intention is to blame him. Either way David is the object of ironic attack as he manipulates the concept of חסד.

3.3 2 Samuel 11:1–27

3.3.1 *2 Samuel 11:1*

At the lower level (the explicit level) of 11:1 David sends Joab, his officers, and all of Israel to war, whilst David stays behind in Jerusalem. In this instance, the ironist emphasizes that David does not lead the Israelites in war even though he was expected to do so (2 Sam. 5:2–3). The incongruity in this passage is between what is said and what is meant. The statement of facts at the lower level seems to be a morally neutral presentation of facts, however, the message of this verse is that David should have been fighting with his troops.

The verbosity in 11:1 and the pointed comment that David remained in Jerusalem, may be interpreted as the ironist's mode of dissimulation (as discussed below). David is considered to be the object of attack. The irony is an instance of simple irony arising from the incongruity between the levels. At the upper level the ironist's criticism which is informed by the background knowledge of David (and expressed in the anomalous language), invalidates the moral neutrality at the lower level. This tension then points to the criticism that David is not living up to his covenant with the Israelites, nor is he living God's favour seriously.

14 Ibid. 274.

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The grade of the irony in this narrative is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. Instead, the irony is conveyed in the specific use of language in the narrative, and with the help of the background knowledge that the reader has of David.

The unusual language which has been used in this verse (and has also been mentioned in reference to 2 Sam. 9:10–13) has been discussed extensively by Perry and Sternberg in their paper, *The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process,*[15] and will be outlined in reference to 2 Samuel 11:1 briefly. Perry and Sternberg suggest that the syntax in 11:1 points to irony, and can be spoken of in reference to the two proposed sections—11:1a which ends with the comment that Rabbah was besieged, and 11:1b which states, ודוד יושב בירושלם.[16] 11:1a is prolix and 11:1b is curt. As mentioned earlier, it is argued that when a prolix comment is combined with one which is curt, it is the shorter section which is emphasized, as the reader is compelled to give the second segment the same attention as he or she gives to the first section (pausing after reading each word). The emphasis of 11:1 is that David remained in Jerusalem.

Perry and Sternberg claim that after the reader is aware of the anomaly in the syntax, he or she will refer back to the wordiness of the first section to evaluate it for subtext. In this case the reader will notice the excessive amount of information that is given in 11:1a and identify it as ironic exaggeration. The verbosity in the middle of the verse thereby adds irony, as the criticism is delivered with "who-what-where details" which seem to suggest an innocent arrangement of facts, or in other words, point to the dissimulation of the ironist with respect to the content of the lower level. The dissimulation which is communicated, albeit implicitly, is communicated in the upper level of the narrative.[17]

The background knowledge which aids the irony is the knowledge that David acts contrary to the expectation that he would lead the Israelites out to war. This expectation is documented in both of the books of Samuel. In the First Book of Samuel, Israel wants a king to go out before her and to fight her battles (1 Sam. 8:20), and in 1 Samuel 18:16 the Israelites begin to shift their allegiance to David as it was, "he who marched out and came in leading them." In the Second Book of Samuel the Israelites make a covenant with David and anoint him as the King of Israel because he led them out to war ahead of Saul

15 Perry and Sternberg, 'The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process,' *Poetics Today*. Vol. 7, 2 (1986), 275–322.

16 Author's translation, "And David remained in Jerusalem."

17 Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomingdale: Indiana University Press, 1985), 193–194. Moreover, the ironic context points to the interpretation of 'I' (11:1b) as 'but' rather than 'and', highlighting the ironist's criticism of David.

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(2 Sam. 5:2–3). This background knowledge of David creates the conflict in 11:1, as David is loved by Israel for leading the army out to war, yet, in this verse David sends Joab and his officers and all of Israel out to battle, while David stays in Jerusalem. This not only demonstrates a conflict between the expectations that Israel had of David and David's actions, but it also confounds the idea that Israel won battles with David as "the LORD was with him" on the battlefield (1 Sam. 18:14).

The mode of verbal irony in this case is impersonal, and the specific subcategory of the mode of impersonal irony is irony displayed. In this instance of irony displayed the ironist has presented the situation of all of Israel at war, yet with David remaining in Jerusalem, as a close confrontation of incompatibles. All of Israel at war is incompatible (in terms of the expectations of the time) with David remaining in Jerusalem. The specific object of attack in 2 Samuel 11.1 is David and the ironic object more broadly understood (the ironic content, so to speak) is David's broken promise to the Israelites.

At this point it is helpful to consider the results of this discussion in the light of the debate surrounding the interpretation of 11:1a. The mainstream interpretation of this verse is, "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle …"[18] However, this interpretation has been widely contested and needs further discussion. The difficulty in translation arises as the verse is literally translated to mean "And it was the turn of the year," however, the text is ordinarily interpreted to mean, "In the spring of the year." The latter interpretation has been favoured as military campaigns were traditionally held in springtime when the conditions were optimal for fighting. The word מלאכים which is literally translated as 'messengers' is ordinarily interpreted as 'kings' for the same reason.[19] However, David Clines makes a persuasive argument that the New Year came around in autumn at the time of this verse—a season when traditionally kings did not go out to battle.[20] Given all this ambiguity with respect to seasons, kings and messengers, McKenzie suggests that the text is referring to David's battle with the Ammonites, when the army went out to war without David (2 Sam. 10:7), and where the author does not appear to be critical of David's decision to remain in Jerusalem.[21] Moreover, it is argued that on the literal interpretation (messengers going to war at the turn of the year)

18 See also Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 35–36.

19 McCarter, Jr. *II Samuel*, 284.

20 David J. A. Clines, "The Evidence for the Autumnal New Year in Pre-exilic Israel Reconstructed," *JBL*, 93, no. 1 (1974), 22–40, 22.

21 Steven McKenzie, "Why did David stay home?" An exegetical study of 2 Samuel 11:1," in, *Raising up a faithful exegete: Essays in Honor of Richard D. Nelson*, eds. K. L. Knoll and Brooks Scramm. (Winona Lake, Indiana, 2010), 149–158, 157.

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a contrast cannot be assumed between King David and other kings, (which Robert Polzin suggests destroys the irony).[22] Furthermore, McKenzie argues that 11:1 points ahead to what happens during the period when David remains in Jerusalem.[23]

However, Muecke's methodology still finds ironic criticism in this passage regardless of this ambiguity, as David did not meet the expectations that the Israelites had of him, namely that he lead his army into battle whatever the season. This incompatibility remains regardless of the narrator's lack of commentary in 2 Samuel 10:7, and is not dependant on a comparison of David with other kings. Thus, "In the return of the year when the *messengers* march out to battle, David stayed in Jerusalem," is equally as damning as "when *kings* march out to battle." It has even been suggested that the ambiguity surrounding the word kings/messengers heightens the irony in the text as it contains the additional irony, that when kings are meant to go to war, messengers go out instead.[24]

3.3.2 *2 Samuel 11:2*

At the lower level (or the explicit level) of 11:2 David arises from his couch, walks around on the roof of the palace and sees a beautiful woman bathing. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist, who has criticized David because he did not lead his troops in battle (11:1), is similarly critical. This time the criticism consists in the implication that David is more interested in a nap and a beautiful woman than the war effort (11:2). This incongruity is an incongruity in the narrative between what is said and what is meant. Although David is portrayed (explicitly at the lower level) as doing rather innocuous things such as napping, walking, and looking from his palace, the message of the verse (implied at the upper level) is that David is cavalier and lascivious. David is the object of ironic attack. The innocence in the narrative is present in the dissimulation of the ironist who pretends that he/she is unaware of the conflict in the narrative.

The grade of the irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The irony is conveyed by means of narrative context (notably 11.1), the choice of language used, and by means of the contrast with 11:1. For instance,[25] משכב indicates that David was taking a siesta prior to spying the woman from the roof of the king's palace, and the *hitpa'el* of הלך suggests that he was casually strolling

22 Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History,* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 109.

23 McKenzie, "Why did David stay at home?" An exegetical study of 2 Samuel 11:1," 158.

24 Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History*, 111.

25 Author's translation, "his bed".

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around the roof of the palace. These words which denote relaxation heighten the stationary appeal of יושב in 11:1a and contrast with the frenetic energy of the Israelites in war (2 Sam. 11:1a). This adds to the contrast between the self-indulgence of David and the self-sacrifice of the Israelites who are in battle.[26]

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is the innuendo. An innuendo may be assumed given the emphasis of the verse on Bathsheba's beauty in the context of prior criticism of David. Moreover, the language follows the same pattern as 11:1. 11:2 may also be broken into two smaller sections; 11:2a which is prolix, and 11:2b which is the curt statement,

והאשה טובת מראה מאד

(The woman was *very* beautiful.)[27]

In keeping with Perry and Sternberg's suggestion, this pattern indicates that there is ironic exaggeration in 11:2a and an emphasis which should arouse suspicion in 11:2b. Of note, although there is a commonality in the language in 11:1 and 11:2, this verse is better interpreted as an innuendo as there is less of a clash of incompatibles (however, this still exists) and more of a suggestion of David's weakness for a beautiful woman.

Pairing the presentation of David as a self-indulgent king who is not concerned with his responsibilities to the Israelites, with the emphasis in 11:2b leads the reader to suspect that the woman's exceptional beauty is a temptation to David. The innuendo in the verse is that David is attracted to the woman. The innuendo in 11:2b coupled with the exaggeration in 11:2a leads the reader to identify the implicit message at the upper level of the narrative as being critical of David's self-indulgent behaviour, particularly when all of Israel is at war. This in turn is the content (or object, broadly understood) of the ironic message, David himself being the specific object of ironic attack.

3.3.3 *2 Samuel 11:3*

At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:3 the (explicit) content is that David sends a person to discover the identity of the woman he sees bathing. The servant tells David that the woman's name is Bathsheba, and that she is the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that the details of the men associated with Bathsheba (details to be discussed shortly), are important as these men are presumably members

26 Fokkelman, "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 51.

27 Translation care of the *Revised Standard Version.*

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of David's elite troops and are presumably at war when David is not. Moreover, if the innuendo in 11:2 is correct, and if it can be assumed that David is tempted by Bathsheba, it may then be inferred that David is guilty of coveting another man's wife (Exod. 20:17, Deut. 5:21). This is a further implication.

In 11.3 there is an incongruity between what is said and what is meant. The messenger gives David a detailed explicit description of Bathsheba and her family, however, the messenger implicitly passes judgment on David by way of his rhetorical question to David, "Do you not know that she is the wife of…" (of which more below). For it may be inferred that the messenger wanted to communicate, but would be afraid to explicitly state, that it would be deeply immoral for David to sleep with Bathsheba.

David may be spoken of, not only as the object of ironic attack, but also as the victim of irony as he is spoken to ironically, and does not appear to understand the implied content and, therefore, the significance, of the messenger's speech. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is implied by way of the context and the language of the narrative. In this instance, the background knowledge of Bathsheba's family suggests irony. The most damning information in this passage is that Bathsheba is married, and that David has begun to pursue a married woman. However, the implied criticism of David is amplified in the knowledge of Bathsheba's family, of which there is a discussion to follow.

Bathsheba is identified as the daughter of Eliam. The identification of a married woman with her father is unusual, and suggests that Eliam was a man of considerable importance. Given this, it is possible that Eliam was Ahithophel's son, and also a member of David's elite troops, as is mentioned in 2 Samuel 23:34.[28] Uriah the Hittite, is clearly spoken of as Bathsheba's husband. Furthermore, Uriah is thought to be one of David's elite warriors called the Thirty, as his house was in close proximity with the palace, which suggests that he was of the elite class.[29] It has also been suggested (and would be further damning) that Uriah was associated with nobility, however, this is questionable as this assumption rests on scant biblical proof (Ezek. 16:3).[30] Given what is known of Bathsheba, Eliam, and Uriah, it would be immoral for the king to pursue Bathsheba.

The mode of verbal irony in question is that of impersonal irony, and it could be argued that the sub-category of verbal irony is that of rhetorical question. However, this remark is contentious. Most translations present the messenger's

28 However, there is not enough information in the text to identify Eliam positively. McCarter Jr. *II Samuel*, 285.

29 Ibid.

30 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 153.

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response to David as a statement of fact, yet, it is more persuasive to interpret the speech in 11:3 as an interrogative. For instance, הלוא זאת appears to indicate that this is a "speculative inquiry." Moreover, the placement of the verb אמר after the verb דרש suggests that David is the subject of the inquiry.[31] It has even been suggested that this might better be translated 'thought,' leading this verse to read as David's own conscience speaking.[32] Yet, as the context does not support the strength of David's conscience, it is more persuasive to suggest that the messenger spoke to David with a rhetorical question.

The use of a rhetorical question creates a subtext, and emphasises the details of the remark. The emphases of the verse are that Bathsheba is married and that her husband and father are men of great stature in the community. This justifies strong criticism of David. This justified criticism of David forms the ironic content and the connection with 11:1 strengthens this criticism. For Uriah is on the battlefield, and Eliam can be assumed to be, whilst David is not. In 11:3 David 'sends' someone to inquire about the beautiful woman he sees bathing, which contrasts with the image of the Israelites whom he 'sent' to war in 11:1. The object of ironic attack is David and the ironic content (object, broadly understood) is that David is coveting the wife of a soldier who is at war.

3.3.4 *2 Samuel 11:4–5*

At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:4 David sends messengers to get Bathsheba, she comes to him, he lies with her, and she returns home. In 11:5 she realises that she is pregnant and sends a messenger to tell David that she is pregnant. At the upper (and, therefore, implicit) level of the narrative the ironist represents the incongruity in the situation: The King of Israel, who is called to uphold the laws, commits adultery. However, this immoral act has been implicitly communicated by way of understated language.[33]

David is the object of ironic attack. The criticism of David that he has broken a law is made at the upper level and this criticism contrasts with the understated events at the lower level. The irony is covert irony as it is not immediately apparent, and the identification of the irony relies on background knowledge in the text, and the language used.

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31 R. C. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10–2* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 94.

32 Keith Bodner, "The Royal Conscience According to 4 QSam," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 11, no. 2 (2004), 158–166, 162.

33 The subject of Bathsheba's complicity in the affair will not be discussed in this book as the ironic criticism appears to be directed towards David. See the following article for a full discussion of Bathsheba's role in the act of adultery; Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, "Was it Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined," *VT*, 61 (2011), 1–15.

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The background knowledge is best understood with reference to the laws which prohibit adultery. Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18 clearly state that adultery is a sin against God. The death penalty for adultery can be found in Deuteronomy 22:22. However, there is debate surrounding the actual enforcement of these laws. Henry McKeating argues that there is no account in the OT of a person being executed for committing adultery, and therefore, the enforcement of these laws cannot be taken at face value.[34] Rather, it has been suggested that they may represent 'ideals' to be strived for.[35] McKeating's argument is not valid. From the fact that adultery might not be enforced by the death penalty it does not follow that it was not enforced by lesser penalties. Moreover, it has been argued that the laws governing adultery were understood as laws protecting a man's property,[36] or protecting the paternity of a man's children.[37] In these cases adultery was viewed as a crime rather than a civil matter, which would make adultery a community concern potentially requiring the death penalty.[38] Regardless of the gravity of the transgression, or the punishment for the action, it can still be said that a negative view of adultery informs this text, this conflict is then heightened by the knowledge that the adulterer is the King of Israel.

The anomalies in the use of language are best understood in terms of ambiguity and understatement. An example of ambiguous language can be found in the word שכב. This word can mean to sleep, or lie down in illness, as well as being a euphemism for sexual intercourse. In this case, it is clarified unambiguously by the context, which relates that Bathsheba conceived (11:5).[39] However,

34 Henry McKeating, "Sanctions Against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society, with Some Reflections on Methodology in the Study of Old Testament Ethics," *JSOT* 4 (1979), 57–72, 58.

35 Ibid., 66.

36 E. Neufeld, *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws* (London: 1944), 163ff.

37 Anthony Phillips, "Another Look at Adultery," *JSOT* 6 (1981), 3–25, 7.

38 Ibid., 19.

39 Yet, there is less certainty when it concerns the curious line in the text after the sexual intercourse in 11:4b. This sentence is ordinarily translated as "(Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house." Most scholars cite this parenthetical note as being retrospective, and thereby, referring to the bath that Bathsheba had prior to her intercourse with David. For instance, McCarter argues that this interpretation suggests that Bathsheba was past the seven days of ritual impurity which are outlined in Leviticus 15:19 and therefore, her intercourse with David occurred at a time where she was most likely to fall pregnant. This interpretation suggests that the sentence clearly states that Uriah could not be the father of the child. (McCarter, Jr. *II Samuel*, 286). However, there are a number of other interpretations of this ambiguous sentence which lend a different emphasis to the passage. Guttmann argues that this sentence indicates that David had defiled himself by having intercourse with a woman who was in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 15:24). (Guttmann (1964: 7) as found in McCarter, Jr. *II Samuel*,

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the more striking anomaly in the narrative is the understated language. The curt presentation of facts is not only striking considering its contrast with the verbosity in the first few verses, but striking also in the light of the importance of the events which are being described. Most saliently, the King of Israel commits an act of adultery which results in a pregnancy.

Therefore, the verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of impersonal irony is understatement. According to Muecke understatement is not always ironic, for instance, "I am not feeling the best" is better understood as a common expression of direct language without a hidden meaning. By contrast, ironic understatement is found in situations which call for strong emotional language but which are made light of.[40] The king's act of adultery which left a married woman pregnant should have been expressed with strong language, and therefore the designation of understatement is appropriate. The content or broad object of the irony is David's act of adultery.

3.3.5 *2 Samuel 11:6–8*

At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:6 Joab sends Uriah to David, on David's command. In 11:7 David asks Uriah how Joab is, and how the war is going. In 11:8 David tells Uriah to go home and wash his feet, and Uriah finds a present awaiting him as he leaves the palace. At the upper (and, therefore, implicit) level there is a dual meaning in David's suggestion that Uriah wash his feet. This suggestion could mean that Uriah should wash his feet since his return to Jerusalem has been tiring. However, there is another meaning

286). This assessment would not only be more critical of David (as he would have made Uriah's wife pregnant and defiled himself), but it would add a further element of obscenity which is that trademark of satirical writing. Another interpretation (which rests on the assumption that the word מתקדשת means consecrating or self-sanctifying) asserts that Bathsheba is presented in this narrative as the sanctified "mother of Israel." (J. D'Ror Chankin-Gould, et al. "The Sanctified 'Adulteress' and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba's Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11," *JSOT*. 2008, 32, 339–352, 339). This claim does not fit readily with Deuteronomy 22:22 where Bathsheba would have been considered guilty of adultery, and would have received the same punishment as David. This background knowledge contradicts the argument that Bathsheba is presented as the sanctified "mother of Israel" in this narrative. A less clumsy interpretation might be that this sentence refers to Bathsheba's act of purification after she had been involved with David. This interpretation is possible as the noun מטמאתה combined with מתקדשׁת can suggest cleansing which follows sexual relations. (J. D'Ror Chankin-Gould, et al., "The Sanctified 'Adulteress' and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba's Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11," 351). Regardless of the ambiguity, it can still be said with certainty that David and Bathsheba had intercourse, and that Bathsheba fell pregnant. This is the damning information as far as the ironist is concerned.

40 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 80.

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which is damning for David. For this comment could be taken as a directive for Uriah to go home and have sexual relations with Bathsheba. This claim can be made with some degree of certainty. First, הרגלים in other biblical references connote the genitals (Ruth 3:4, 7; Ezek. 16:25). Second, there is the allusion to sexual relations in 11:4, so, it would be consistent if this verse was an allusion to sexual intercourse also.

David's comment to Uriah that he should have intercourse with Bathsheba and defile himself points to the incongruity in the narrative, as David is known as a person who is very strict when it concerns the rules of ritual purity (1 Sam. 21:5), and the customs of hospitality (1 Sam. 25:13). This opposition indicates that David is the object of ironic attack. Of note, Uriah is not the victim of verbal irony as he is not arrogantly unaware.

The grade of irony is covert, and is conveyed by the anomalies in the language, and by recourse to the background information. 11:6 begins with the familiar word שלח. So far in the narrative this word has been attached to all of the tension surrounding David's actions. For example, David 'sent' Joab and all of Israel out to war when he ought to have been leading the army (11:1), David 'sends' the servant to inquire about the woman he sees bathing (11:3), David 'sends' for the woman (11:4), and she 'sends' word back to David that she is pregnant (11:5). Thereby, the use of שלח three times in 11:6 is significant. In the following verse, in contrast to the three mentions of שלח there are three mentions of the word שלום. This contrast, and the repetition of the word שלום point to the insincerity of David for the narrative thus far suggests that David is not concerned with the harmony that the word שלום implies.[41] Furthermore, if *shalom* is interpreted to mean 'peace', as I interpret it to be, then this verse is highly ironic. First David asks Uriah if there is peace with Joab, if there is peace with the soldiers in the war, and then if there is peace with the war itself!

The pertinent background information of the narrative is that David is otherwise excessively concerned with the standards of sacral law. In 1 Samuel 21:5 David assures Abimelech that the soldier's כלי (which means 'vessels,' another euphemism for genitals)[42] were קדש or 'holy' on ordinary journeys, and especially when the soldiers were on active duty. David's extreme (if not overstated) assurance to Abimelech of the soldiers' purity in 1 Samuel 21:5 then calls into question his insistence that Uriah go to his house for sexual relations. If Uriah were to do as David instructs he would be guilty of contravening the

41 Perry and Sternberg, "The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process," 299.

42 Tony W. Cartledge, *SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwyns Publishing Inc., 2001), 254.

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strict sacral regulations of soldiers in battle. This knowledge was fully known to David. The gift which David has presented to Uriah is, in context, best considered as a bribe, which makes the criticism of David even sharper.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of verbal irony is irony displayed. In this instance, the close confrontation of incompatibles is best understood in the contrast of David's apparent concern for Joab, the Israelites at war, and the war itself in 11:7 with his directive to Uriah to compromise himself and the war effort by lying with his wife in 11:8 (particularly, when this is considered with the knowledge of David's reported concern for the purity of soldiers in battle). This contrast is heightened by the three mentions of שׁלום in 11:7, and with the lack of שׁלום in 11:8. The content of the irony is David's attempt to cover-up his transgression, and his abuse of hospitality in the process.

3.3.6 *2 Samuel 11:9–11*

At the lower (explicit) level of 11:9 Uriah sleeps at the entrance of the king's palace instead of going home. In 11:10 the servants tell David that Uriah did not go down to his house, and David asks Uriah why he did not go to his house. In 11:11 Uriah asks David if David thinks it would be inappropriate for him to go to his home and enjoy the comforts of his wife. At the upper (implicit) level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is immoral for asking Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. This irony is evident in Uriah's rhetorical question in 11:11:

ואני אבוא אל־ביתי לאכל ולשׁתות ולשׁכב עם־אשׁתי
(Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife?)[43]

This question can easily be identified as a rhetorical question as Uriah does not wait for an answer from David, and Uriah answers his own question in the following way,

חיך וחי נפשׁך אם־אעשׂה את־הדבר הזה
(As you live, and your desire lives, I will not do this thing.)[44]

Also, of note is the damning information which prefaces Uriah's rhetorical question in 11:11,

43 Translation care of the *Revised Standard Version*.
44 Author's translation.

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> הארון וישׂראל ויהודה ישׁבים בסכות ואדני יואב ועבדי אדני על־פני השׂדה חנים
> (The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field …)[45]

Mention of the ark is significant, as it strengthens the pejorative content of the irony displayed in the previous passage. For the presence of the ark in battle required that all soldiers be ritually pure, and abstain from sexual activity (Deut. 23:9–14). Thereby, it would seem that David put his need to cover-up his transgression above the need for ritual purity in soldiers, and presumably therefore, potentially compromised the war effort. The fact that it is a foreigner, or a soldier of foreign descent who has to inform the king of Yahweh's rules for ritual purity could be regarded as a parodying feature of satire.

The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what Uriah says and what he means. Uriah asks David a question, however, Uriah does not want an answer from David. The rhetorical question creates a stark contrast between Uriah's upright behaviour and David's duplicity.[46] Uriah is not prepared to enjoy the luxuries of civilian life whilst *all* of Israel is away fighting, nor is he prepared to breach any rules which may be damaging to the army and Israel as a whole. Whereas, David is presented as living in self-indulgent luxury and being injurious to those he is meant to administer justice to. The personal pronoun **אני** in 11:11b creates a contrast between Uriah, who righteously will not lie with his wife, with David who has already done so illicitly. The pejorative criticism here is heightened by a further contrast between Uriah and David, in the exaggerated vow that Uriah makes in David's name.[47] David is obviously the object of ironic attack and the content of the irony is David's attempt to defile Uriah which would compromise the war-effort. Moreover, this rhetorical question in this context renders the implied criticism fairly obvious. So, the form of verbal irony is overt.

3.3.7 *2 Samuel 11:12–13*

At the lower level of 11:12 David requests that Uriah stay in Jerusalem for an extra day. In 11:13 David invites Uriah to eat and drink with him and David makes Uriah drunk. However, Uriah does not go home and sleep with Bathsheba. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist insinuates that David actions are underhanded, and that although he appears to be showing hospitality to Uriah,

45 Translation care of the *New Revised Standard Version*.

46 Ridout, "Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2)," 124.

47 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 127.

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David's real and deceptive intentions are contrary to his apparent innocuous intentions. The ironist insinuates that David gets Uriah drunk in another manipulative attempt to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. The opposition in this passage concerns the difference between the matter-of-fact presentation of facts, with the real message of this section which is as follows: David who is otherwise strict when it comes to matters of hospitality is a hypocrite.

Yet again, David is the target of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert as it is conveyed by relying in part on the background knowledge concerning David. In particular, the irony relies on features of the context of the narrative, specifically, the story of David and Nabal which displays David's knowledge of the importance of showing hospitality to a guest. In 1 Samuel 25 David demonstrates how important hospitality is to him when Nabal refuses David hospitality. In this narrative Nabal refuses to feed David and his men. (See the rhetorical question in 1 Sam. 25:11.) David is so angered by Nabal that he is prepared to kill Nabal for ignoring the proper customs of hospitality (1 Sam. 25:34). Therefore, observing the custom of hospitality would appear to be important to David.

However, the story of David and Uriah is different from the story of David and Nabal. David does provide Uriah with food, drink, and the offer of shelter. Yet, the חסד—an inherent part of hospitality—is not demonstrated in David's actions. In 11:11–12 the offer of food and alcohol is given to Uriah to make him pliable so that David can manipulate him into sleeping with Bathsheba with the ultimate purpose of covering up his own transgression. The offer of shelter in this instance further heightens the criticism of David. For Uriah is not offered to sleep in the palace—an action which would protect Uriah from tainting his reputation. Instead, David commands that Uriah go to his own house (11:8). Thereby, the ironist in this passage is critical of David's decision to extend the acts of hospitality, but not the חסד which is an inherent element of hospitality. This too is the content of the irony. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, as the ironist is not a character in the narrative. The subcategory of impersonal irony is irony displayed. The confrontation of incompatibles in this instance is best expressed in 11:13. In 11:13 the King of Israel acts in a manner which is contrary to the conventions of Israel. By contrast, Uriah, who may be a foreigner, or is at least of foreign descent, nevertheless lives in accordance with the standards of Israelite law.

3.3.8 *2 Samuel 11:14–15*

At the lower level of 11:14 David writes a note for Joab, which he gives to Uriah to deliver to Joab. In the note David commands that Uriah be placed at the front of the heaviest fighting, and that the other troops withdraw from Uriah in the fighting (11:15). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist does not

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see the situation as David sees it. Here the ironist's contrasting view relies on important background information that the ironist has with respect to God's laws and the expectations of David as a king. David's request for Joab to, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die" (11:15) is shocking, as the reader expects the king to administer justice, and be obedient to the laws. The opposition in this section arises from the difference between what David does and what is expected of David.

David is the target of ironic attack. David's actions are in breach of God's laws and, as king, he has a special—indeed, God-given—duty to see to it that Joab complies with these laws. Crucially, David is not only breaking the law himself and not doing his duty to ensure others comply with the law, he is strenuously trying to cause others to break the law; in this instance he is trying to cause Joab to break the law. Moreover, David is trying to cause Joab to break a central and important law. This is not only ironic, but morally wrong and profoundly corrupt.

Uriah is not the victim of verbal irony, as Uriah merely follows a command to deliver the letter and is unaware of the contents of the letter. Nor is Joab the victim of irony. For while the irony of the situation may escape him, this ignorance is not the product of arrogance or stupidity, i.e. it is not in Muecke's terms, "confident unawareness".

The irony is a simple irony arising from a contrast between the two levels. At the lower level David, in effect, orders the killing of an innocent, at the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is an incongruity between David's actions and the expectation that the king administer justice (as explained above).

The grade of irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent and needs to be understood after consideration of the context. As already mentioned, the King of Israel is meant to uphold the laws. In 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites demand a king to govern them and deliver justice, as Samuel's sons were corrupt (1 Sam. 8:5). Yet, in 11:14 David is presented as a king who views himself as above the law and readily breaks and causes others to break the law when it suits him.[48] Instead of providing justice David signs the death warrant of an innocent man. This puts Israel at risk, as bloodguilt has not been properly regarded.[49] Furthermore, David's instruction to kill an innocent is incongruous

48 Carole Fontaine, "The Bearing of Wisdom on the Shape of 2 Samuel 11–12 and 1 and Kings 3," *JSOT* 34 (1986), 61–67, 65.

49 Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 199.

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as he is called to be a king who administers justice (2 Sam. 8:15) but is, in this instance, a king who the innocent need protection from!

The mode of irony in this instance is irony displayed, and the confrontation of incompatibles can be seen in the contrast of the King of Israel sending a note with an upright soldier to take to the general (11:14), with the knowledge that this note was a death warrant (11:15). The object of irony, or that which the ironist is being ironical about, is David's act of ordering Uriah's execution.

Of note, in isolation the motif of Uriah carrying his own death letter,[50] could be considered to be observable irony. In observable irony the state of affairs in and of itself brings forth the irony of the cosmic order, rather than requiring a satirist to engineer the irony (and in satire the ironic content is critical of someone or something). Moreover, it might be said that something is ironic but not a cause for moralizing, as opposed to verbal irony—used in satire—where the ironist is being deliberately critical of someone's moral defects.[51] However, as argued, it is preferable to regard this verse as an example of verbal irony. For one thing, the event is not to be taken in isolation of background facts about the role of the king. For another, it is possible to detect the impersonal ironist's criticism of David—criticism which has been consistent throughout the narrative.

3.3.9 *2 Samuel 11:16–17*

This episode extends the verbal irony in 11:14–15. At the lower level of 11:16 Joab places Uriah in the heaviest fighting. In 11:17 some of David's servants are killed along with Uriah in the fighting. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist's emphasis is on the number of soldiers who had to die to conceal David's transgression. The opposition in the narrative concerns the incongruity between what is said and what is meant. The facts are presented without a moral judgement. However, the moral judgement is revealed in the anomalous language in the verses. David is the target of ironic attack, as his attempt to cover-up his sin by recourse to, in effect, causing soldiers engaged in fighting on Israel's behalf to face inevitable death, is spoken of ironically.

The grade of irony is covert, as the irony is conveyed in the language and reliant on the context of the narrative. For example, Uriah's death in 11:17 almost reads as an after-thought. However, this verse conforms to the same structure

50 The motif of a soldier carrying his own death note is well-known in world literature. See McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 287.

51 For a fuller account on the differences of isn't it ironic, and "the ironist being ironical," read, D. C. Muecke, *Irony* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970) and, D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*.

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as 11:1, and 11:2, where the emphasis is contained in the truncated section. Thereby, the emphasis in this verse is that Uriah is killed (11:17b). Yet, there is still another damning proposition which comes through in 11:17a, namely, that some of the servants of David were sacrificed in order to implement his plan. This contrast makes the verbal irony in this section impersonal irony and irony displayed. The confrontation of incompatibles, which is a necessary element of irony displayed, could best be described as the contrast of the Israelites dying in a battle the king sent them to fight, with the knowledge that the King of Israel was responsible for their deaths not because they need to die in the service of Israel but rather because they died in order to conceal his transgressions.

This verse reflects on the criticism in 11:1 where it is plainly stated that the servants of David, and indeed all of Israel, went out to war even as David stayed in Jerusalem. Now the reader is aware that not only did David stay behind in luxury when there was an expectation that he would lead the army out to war, but that David from the comfort of Jerusalem, caused the death of a number of elite soldiers in order to conceal his transgressions. This verse, then, heightens the irony displayed in 11:1, and adds a more sinister edge to it, as the criticism of the ironist is now two-fold; (1) David did not lead the Israelites out to war, and (2) David culpably caused the deaths of a number of the soldiers he sent out to war. These events conflict with the expectations that Israel had of David, and Yahweh's expectations as they are laid out in the laws.

There is a further ironic twist. David's original plan to conceal his transgression involved only Uriah being exposed to certain death. Joab immediately recognised that this would not work since singling out Uriah in this manner would raise widespread suspicion and draw attention to David's transgression rather than conceal it. Thus, Joab modified David's plan by exposing not only Uriah to death but also some of the elite soldiers. This episode is ironic in that David's original plan far from concealing his transgression would have exposed it to all and sundry. Here David is the target of ironic attack and his foolishness is implied. Moreover, he is the unknowing victim since he is confidently unaware of his foolishness.

3.3.10 *2 Samuel 11:18–21*

At the lower level of 11:18 Joab decides to tell David all the news of the fighting. In 11:18–21 Joab warns the messenger that David may become angry when he hears the news of the war. (Note that we learn later in 11:24 that the Israelites sustained many losses in the battle, in part because they got too close to the enemy's wall and were killed.) Joab informs the messenger that David may tell the messenger the story of Abimelech. (Note that it is well-known that Abimelech

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got killed when he got too close to the enemy's wall (Judg. 9:52–54).) Joab advises the messenger to tell David that Uriah the Hittite is also dead—or, at least, to do so if David gets angry. At the upper level of the narrative there is more than meets the eye in Joab's mention of Abimelech. Abimelech created a kingdom through murder and deceit (Judg. 9:1–6). However, he was killed at a battle in Thebez when a woman threw a millstone at his head from a tower, and he asked his armour-bearer[52] to kill him with a sword, lest people find out a woman killed him (Judg. 9:51–54). Abimelech's death was attributed to divine justice: "Thus God repaid Abimelech for the crime he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. God also made all the wickedness of the people of Shechem fall back on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham son of Jerubbal" (Judg. 9:56–57).

The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what Joab says and what Joab means. In Joab's speech he refers to Abimelech, the unrighteous king, however, the truth of his message is that he believes that David is as unrighteous as Abimelech. The innocence in the narrative is the ironist's dissimulation in the various rhetorical questions asked by Joab. The grade of irony is covert, as it is conveyed through the ambiguity in the passage, in particular, in Joab's mention of Abimelech.

This message will be discussed further, as the meaning of this message is the subject of debate. McCarter suggests that the ambiguity in this passage is designed to convey a message to the king, whilst hiding it from the messenger.[53] Carole Fontaine expands on this idea and remarks that Joab's reference to the woman who killed Abimelech, leads the reader to believe that Joab is aware of David's activities with Bathsheba. The reference to the woman who brings death is then a metaphor which veils Joab's knowledge of the crime from the messenger, but allows the king to know of his disapproval.[54] However, these interpretations rest on the assumption that Joab is telling the messenger to relay the information about Abimelech to David, whereas, Joab suggests that the messenger *may* mention Abimelech's misfortune, if David is angry.

Furthermore, Joab lets the messenger know that David's anger will be assuaged by the knowledge of Uriah's death (11:20; 21b). Joab also lets it be known to the messenger that Joab is well aware of the dangers of fighting too close to the city and that, nevertheless, Joab went ahead and did it anyway (11:20–21). Thereby, the interpretation that Joab coded his message to David in order to

52 Note that Uriah the Hittite is mentioned as Joab's armour-bearer in 4QSamuel 11:3.

53 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 288. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1990), 277.

54 Carole Fontaine, "The Bearing of Wisdom on the Shape of 2 Samuel 11–12 and 1 Kings 3", 65.

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conceal the truth from the messenger, is not correct. Instead, it might be argued that the reason for Joab's outburst of rhetorical questions can be attributed to the presence of impersonal irony. That is, criticism of David is to be found in the rhetorical questions in Joab's speech, making the sub-category of rhetorical question the primary sub-category of verbal irony found in this passage. Therefore, the ironic content in this passage is to be found in Joab's rhetorical questions, and in particular in Joab's mention of Abimelech. Here clearly David is the object of ironic attack.

The allusions, and criticisms in Joab's rhetorical question are heightened by the same pattern of verbosity and conciseness that have been mentioned in other passages. Going by this pattern, the emphasis in this narrative is that Uriah is dead (11:21b), and it is the exaggeration in 11:20–21a which contains the ironist's criticism of David. The exaggeration in the first section can point in a number of different directions. Fokkelman suggests that the main criticism in this narrative is that David has allowed himself to fall victim to a woman.[55] So too has Blenkinsopp, and Gunn who mentions the ever-present motif of "the woman who brings death."[56] While this claim has merit, it is not the only interpretation of this verse. Up to this point in the narrative, pejorative criticism has concentrated on David, and in an unmitigated way. In the case of Abimelech's death, although, it was a woman who killed him, his death is also recorded as God's repayment for Abimelech's iniquity. The curse of Jotham, then, is a stern warning that kingship which is dishonourable will be met with a violent end.[57] This curse addresses the need for an honourable relationship between the king and his subjects, otherwise, the entire community is at risk of God's wrath.[58] Thereby, Joab's rhetorical questions (and the ironist's criticism of David) surely is not only the criticism that David has allowed a woman to get him into trouble, but also that David has gotten himself into an unrighteous relationship with God.

3.3.11 *2 Samuel 11:22–25*

At the lower level of 11:22–24 the messenger gives David the news of the war. In 11:25 David tells the messenger to relay a message of encouragement to Joab. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist contrasts the messenger's troubling report to David of Israelite deaths and David's off-hand message to Joab that

55 Fokkelman, "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 67–70.

56 J. Blenkinsopp, "Jonathan's Sacrilege. 1 SM 14–46: A Study in Literary History," *CBQ* 26 (1964), 52–56. See also the motif of "the woman who brings death" in David Gunn's article, "Traditional Composition in the 'Succession Narrative,'" *VT* 26, no. 2 (1976), 214–219.

57 Susan Niditch, Judges (London: Westminster Knox Press, 2008), 116.

58 J. Clinton McCann, *Judges* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 73.

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is dismissive of these deaths. There is an opposition in the narrative between what David says and the grim reality behind these deaths. At the lower level, David's message is that it is the nature of war to consume men, yet at the upper level, the ironist knows that it is David's desire to conceal his transgressions and resulting command to Joab that was the cause of the deaths in 11:17.

The striking contrast is between the messenger's report that Uriah is dead (11:24b) and David's understated response in 11:25,

> אל־ירע בעיניך את־הדבר הזה כי־כזה תאכל ההרב
> (Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another.)[59]

In this sentence, it would appear that David is suggesting to Joab that he need not be concerned as men die all the time in battle. This verse, then points back to 11:1, where there was only a hint that David was doing anything wrong by not leading the Israelites in war. Verse 11:25 suggests that David's character is worse than was originally thought. Now, David is responsible for the deaths of his own men, despite being far away in Jerusalem. The ironist at the upper level of the narrative, then, has a complex grouping of criticisms of David, most recently that he is ambivalent about the lives of his soldiers. David is the victim of irony, as he is unaware that his own words betray him. The messenger is not the victim of irony, because, although the messenger is unaware of David's conspiracy, the messenger is not 'confidently' unaware. Or in other words, there is no indication of intellectual hubris in the messenger. The verbal irony may be spoken of as covert as it needs to be discovered. The irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is understatement. In this kind of irony, a situation which calls for a strong emotional response is made light of. Note, though, David may not have a strong emotional response to Uriah's death (or may even be pleased that Uriah has died) in the lower level of the text, the comment may also be understood to be understated in the upper level of the text. The object of the irony is David's coldness in response to Uriah's death.

3.3.12 *2 Samuel 11:26–27a*

The verses 11:26–27a are transition verses. However, these verses may still be regarded as examples of impersonal irony. The sub-category of impersonal irony in question is that of understatement. 11:26–27 are not dissimilar from 11:4–5, which contain a good number of events which are spoken of concisely. In some regards, these verses are a counterpart to 11:4–5. For example, in 11:4–5

59 Translation care of the *New King James Version*.

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Bathsheba goes to her house, and informs David of her pregnancy, in 11:26–27a, David takes Bathsheba to his house, and she bears him a child. This is all spoken of in understated language which gives the impression that everything is back to normal for the king. It may even be suggested that he has come through his transgressions unscathed, or even that he is now in a better position than he was before his sins.

3.3.13 *Summary of Irony in 2 Samuel 9:1–11:1–27a*

The irony in 9:1–10 is an example of overstatement. David's act of חסד to Mephibosheth is overstated and insincere. The irony that is displayed in the following section (9:10–13) highlights this insincerity further when David's 'kindness' to Mephibosheth is contrasted with David's dislike of the disabled. An insinuation that David intends to wage war against Hanun rather than show חסד to him arises in 10:1–2. Verse 11:1 is an example of irony displayed. The ironist is critical of David's decision not to honour the covenant he made with the Israelites (2 Sam. 5:2–3). Whilst remaining in Jerusalem, David is presented as a self-serving king in the innuendo in 11:2. The rhetorical question in 11:3 adds a further ironic criticism that David is coveting the wife of another man. The knowledge that Uriah and Eliam were away fighting when David was organising a tryst with Bathsheba, adds depth to the criticism that David did not go out to war, when it was expected that he would. Pejorative criticism of David is further strengthened in the understatement in 11:4–5. Not only has David refused to go to war, and coveted another man's wife, the seriousness of the ironic criticism increases as he commits an act of adultery with Bathsheba, and impregnates her.

In 11:6–8, the ironist is critical of David's disregard for the rules of ritual purity for soldiers. This is expressed by means of irony displayed. The criticism of David's disregard for the laws of ritual purity is further explored in 11:9–11, where there is a contrast between Uriah who is righteous with David who is corrupt. David's manipulations continue in 11:12–13, when David gets Uriah drunk in an attempt to make Uriah do David's will. These verses are instances of irony displayed as they suggest a contrast between the righteousness of Uriah with the corruptness of David. For instance, Uriah remains in a right relationship with Yahweh when he refuses to break the laws of ritual purity. This creates a broader contrast with David who appears to be falling away from Yahweh. David's behaviour declines further when he sends Uriah out to battle carrying his own death-note (11:14–15). The criticism in this section emerges by means of irony displayed, as David is shown to be a king who has no regard for administering justice, and who, in this instance, became a king who killed an innocent man and put all of Israel at risk of bloodguilt. The same criticism

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follows through to 11:16–17 when David's command to have Uriah executed costs the lives of more of his own soldiers.

Verses 11:18–21—which include Joab's rhetorical question which alludes to Abimelech's kingship—point to the dire consequences for the monarchy and its subjects if the king is not in a right relationship with God's laws. This criticism is then applied to David. The irony in 11:22–25 is an understatement. The ironic criticism in this section suggests that David does not care for the lives of the soldiers that he sends out to war; after all he is the cause of their deaths. Throughout these verses there is a pattern of consistent and somewhat relentless pejorative criticism of David by means of verbal irony in which he is the object of ironic attack. Therefore, at this stage of interpretation it can be concluded that there is a militant form of verbal irony throughout the narrative to this point.

3.4 2 Samuel 11:27b–12:31

3.4.1 *2 Samuel 11:27b*

2 Samuel 11:27b states,

> וירע הדבר אשר־עשה דוד בעיני יהוה
> (But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.)[60]

This statement links back to David's cavalier remark that Joab need not see the death of Uriah as anything evil. In this regard, God voices the ironist's criticism of David explicitly. Given that God's evaluation of the events is representative of absolute moral authority,[61] it can then be assumed that the ironist's criticism is in keeping with the integrity of the narrative.

3.4.2 *2 Samuel 12:1–6*

At the lower level of 12:1–6 God sends a message to David via Nathan. Nathan tells David a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man is accused of stealing the poor man's ewe lamb and feeding it to a traveller. In 12:5–6 David is made angry by the story and requests that the rich man make severe restitution. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is a connection between the situation of the parable and David's own life. David is the object of ironic attack since the parable is about him. He is also the victim

60 Translation care of the *New American Standard Bible*.

61 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 19.

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of irony as he is confidently unaware that the parable is about him. The 'confident' element is expressed in the extreme sentence that David gives to the rich man who resembles David (12:6). The opposition in the passage exists in the difference between what is said and what is meant.

The grade of the verbal irony is covert, and the mode of irony is impersonal. The sub-category of impersonal irony is irony by analogy. Irony by analogy can be detected when the ironist presents an imaginary situation in order to criticise one that is real.[62] There are no strict rules for irony by analogy, as it can take a number of different forms. However, in all instances of this sub-category of verbal irony one situation (or action, pattern of behaviour etc.) that is explicitly spoken of implicitly points to a secondary situation. Moreover, it is implied that the second situation is analogous to the first one.

In the case of Nathan's Parable, most scholars have tried to match David's misdeeds in 2 Sam 11 exactly with the events in 2 Sam 12.[63] However, it would appear that the allusions are more complex. Although there does appear to be

62 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 304–305. This speech also referred to as a משל which is a "judgement-eliciting" device in the Hebrew Bible, as opposed to *parabole* which is a Greek term. However, both terms have a similar meaning which Kruschwitz has written as being, "similarity or comparison." (Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, "2 Samuel 12:1–15: How (Not) to Read a Parable," *Review and expositor* 109, no. 2 (2012), 253–259, 254.)

63 For example, most scholars consider that Uriah represents the poor man in the narrative, and that Bathsheba is analogous to the ewe (Jeremy Schipper, "Did David Overinterpret Nathan's Parable in 2 Samuel 12:1–6?" 384 & Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, "2 Samuel 12:1–15: How (Not) to Read a Parable," *Review and expositor* 109, no. 2 (2012), 254). Yet, Blenkinsopp, remarks, "… Bathsheba was Uriah's wife not his daughter, she was destined for David himself not a visiting guest, and it was Uriah not Bathsheba who ended up dead." (Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament. The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism*, Revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 40). Rabbinic writers Rashi and Kimchi speak of the poor man as Uriah, and the traveller and wayfarer as "the Evil Inclination." (As cited in, Peter W. Coxon, "A Note on 'Bathsheba' in 2 Samuel 12, 1–6," *Bib* 62 (1981), 248). Yet, Uriah has also been placed in the position of the traveller, as has David. Schipper suggests that Joab is the rich man as he is the one who ultimately organises Uriah's murder; David is the traveller, Uriah the lamb, and Bathsheba the poor man. (Shipper, 384). Gunn suggests that Uriah is the lamb. (Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*, 41). Lienhard Delekat writes that God is the rich man, as God was the transgressor because he could have saved Uriah. (Lienhard Delekat. 'Tendenz und Theologie der David-Solomo-Erzählung,' in *Das ferne und nahe Wort: Festschrift Leonhard Rost zur Vollendung* seines 70. Lebensjahres am 30. November 1996 Ed. Fritz Maass; BZAW 105; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967, 33. David Janzen, "The Condemnation of David's 'taking' in 2 Samuel 12:1–14," *JBL* 131, no. 2 (2012), 213). Daube has suggested that Saul is the rich man, David the poor man, and Michal the ewe, and that this is a parable which David was previously aware of, and which suggested that David had become as oppressive as Saul whom he replaced. (David Daube, "Nathan's Parable," *Novum Testamentum* 24, no. 3 (1982), 275–288, 281–282). Polzin suggests that God is the rich man, the poor man is a metaphor

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similarities in these stories, it does not seem to be possible to create an absolute equivalent.

To order to address this difficulty, it has been suggested that the narrative is disguised in order to keep David from identifying it as his own case.[64] However, there is a problem with this interpretation. Notably, if the crime differs too much from the parable then the analogy breaks down and, as a consequence, the corrective self-judgement cannot take effect.[65] David Daube, in addressing this concern, presents a number of interesting interpretations which allow for a broad understanding of the text. Daube's potential interpretations of the text include the idea that a simile need not be created with exactitude, that the generic character of the parable engenders creative analogical interpretation, or that the author was plainly inept. The most persuasive argument must be that it is not necessary to try and harmonize all of the elements of the events in the parable with David's crime as an exact match cannot and need not be found.[66] It might also be noted that an exact duplication of David's crime would not work as a corrective given that, as suggested by David's comment in 11:25, he is in no way troubled by his actions. Accordingly, the parable that is analogous to David's behaviour needs to be both similar and different to David's behaviour. It needs to be similar in order for a comparison to be drawn. It needs to be different—and pointed—in order for corrective self-judgement to be possible.

Irony by analogy does not require an exact representation of events and characters. Instead, its focus is to set up an analogy by means of which to make a criticism of the object of ironic attack. This can be achieved by means of two sets of events and characters which mirror each other perfectly. Alternatively, the analogy might be imperfect and the explicitly described situation might only hint at the situation that it seeks to criticise. The difference in these possibilities is the grade of irony which is used. In the latter case the irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent and needs to be uncovered.

Contrary to other scholars who have discussed this passage, I argue that Nathan's Parable reflects on two prior stories; the story of David and Nabal, and the story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba. An outline of the encounter of David and Nabal follows. Nabal was a rich man who had three thousand sheep, along with a thousand goats (1 Sam. 25:2), yet, he would not provide for David and his soldiers who were travelling through the land (1 Sam. 25:11). David armed

for Saul's kingdom, and the wayfarer is David. (Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History*, 124).

64 Daube, "Nathan's Parable," 277.

65 Janzen, "The Condemnation of David's 'taking' in 2 Samuel 12:1–14," 209.

66 Daube, "Nathan's Parable," 275.

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himself with his sword to approach Nabal (1 Sam. 25:13). David suggested that Nabal had repaid David's good with evil (1 Sam. 25:21). Yet, Abigail intervened and provided food for David and his soldiers and thus saved David from the bloodguilt of killing Nabal (1 Sam. 25:23–26). Abigail calls upon Yahweh to bless David and save him from having a guilty conscience for shedding blood without cause (1 Sam. 25:28–31). Nabal dies and David says (1 Sam. 25:39),

> ברוך יהוה אשׁר רב את־ריב הרפתי מיד נבל ואת־עבדו השׁך מרעה ואת רעת נבל השׁיב יהוה בראשׁו
>
> (Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from evil. The LORD has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head.)[67]

David marries Abigail (1 Sam. 25:39b).

Knowing how inflamed David was by Nabal's refusal to provide for him in a fair manner (and that this narrative shared the themes of hospitality and bloodguilt with the story of David and Bathsheba), it would be reasonable for the storyteller to incorporate this story into the overall narrative of David's transgressions (in 2 Sam. 11). For doing so might serve the purpose of getting David to see the error of his ways and make a corrective self-judgement.

If we assume, as other scholars have not, that this story (i.e. the story of David and Nabal) informs Nathan's Parable—and does so in addition to the story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba—then we can provide a richer and more adequate interpretation of Nathan's Parable. From this perspective, reference to the rich man and the traveller in Nathan's Parable hint at the David and Nabal episode in which Nabal was the rich man and David was the traveller. Yet, in Nathan's Parable, David is the rich man, and also the fool. By comparison, in the David and Nabal episode, Nabal is the fool for not providing hospitality to David. After all, David and his soldiers will kill Nabal if he fails to provide food etc. Given this, let us now reconsider Nathan's Parable. In Nathan's Parable it is David who is the rich man. Therefore, by analogy with the David and Nabal episode, it is David who is the fool. נבל means fool in Hebrew.

Characterising David as a fool fits in well with the fact that he is the object of criticism in Nathan's Parable which is something most commentators agree on (albeit they do not necessarily agree with me that David is the object of *ironic* attack). However, an exact comparison between the episode in David and Nabal and the episode in Nathan's Parable is not possible. Whereas Nabal did not offer hospitality to David (1 Sam. 25:11), the rich man in Nathan's Parable

67 Translation care of the NAS.

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does offer hospitality to the traveller. However, the hospitality in Nathan's Parable is given without חסד (2 Sam. 12:4). Moreover, to bring in the David, Uriah and Bathsheba episode, when David extends hospitality to Uriah he does so without goodwill. A further point, again relying on the story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba, pertains to the poor man and the lamb. In Nathan's Parable the poor man has his lamb taken from him. In the David, Uriah and Bathsheba story, Uriah has Bathsheba taken from him. Accordingly, there is an analogy between Uriah and the poor man, and between Bathsheba and the lamb. I note that the analogy is strengthened by the fact that Bathsheba, like the lamb, would have been regarded as property and, therefore, taking her is akin to theft (as in the case of taking the lamb).

A somewhat tangential point about the relationship between the David and Nabal story and the David, Uriah and Bathsheba story, concerns the criticism of Bathsheba. In 1 Samuel 25:32–34 David recounts that God sent Abigail to intervene on Nabal's behalf in order to prevent David from incurring bloodguilt. However, there is a noticeable absence of any intervention by Bathsheba on Uriah's behalf, which would have prevented David from incurring bloodguilt.

Returning to Nathan's Parable or, at least, its aftermath, not only is David oblivious to the analogy between himself and the rich man, David imposes an excessive punishment upon the rich man: the death penalty.[68] The irony here is that David is imposing an excessive penalty on the rich man in the context of his own transgressions being analogous to those of the rich man. A number of scholars have mentioned the disproportionate sentence in relation to the crime in 12:5.[69] Janzen remarks that the only crime the rich man was guilty of was to steal a lamb, which is not punishable by death.[70] These interpretations align with an ironic interpretation which views David's exaggerated response as another indication that he is the object of ironic attack as well as being the unknowing victim of irony in this passage. The excessive punishment is also an illustration of David's failings to administer justice adequately. Daube, on the other hand, suggests that while the death penalty is too extreme for the killing of a lamb (one of the rich man's crimes) it is entirely fitting for David's own transgression of murder.[71]

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68 Cartledge writes that interpreting the "son of death" (12:5) as an invective takes away the incongruity of a death sentence sitting alongside a small fiscal restitution. Cartledge, *SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel*, 515. Yet, this interpretation diminishes the irony which is pronounced with the overstatement.

69 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 151. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10–12*, 105–106. Daube, "Nathan's Parable," 276.

70 Janzen, "The Condemnation of David's "taking" in 2 Samuel 12:1–14," 209.

71 Daube, "Nathan's Parable," 276.

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A further point not entertained in previous interpretations of Nathan's Parable relies on invoking the story of David and Nabal. This point pertains to David's strictness in respect of breaches of principles governing the provision of hospitality, i.e. that hospitality be provided and that it be provided ethically and lawfully, e.g. Not by theft of someone else's lamb. In the David and Nabal story, David responds to Nabal's lack of hospitality by sentencing him to death (1 Sam. 25:13; 34). In Nathan's Parable, David sentences the rich man to death because the rich man stole and killed a lamb to provide hospitality to a traveller. However, David himself breaches the principles of hospitality when he offers Uriah hospitality but does so only to conceal his own transgressions. Presumably, this warrants the death sentence, at least by the lights of David's strict understanding of the principles of hospitality. The irony here is irony by analogy and the ironic content pertains to David's behaviour with respect to the principles of hospitality. David is the object of ironic attack and also the unknowing victim of irony.

The upshot of this novel strategy of identifying connections between all three stories, i.e. David and Nabal, David, Uriah and Bathsheba, and Nathan's Parable, is as follows. First, David is the object of multiple ironic attacks on his moral character—all being instances of verbal irony—including: murder of Uriah; 'theft' of Bathsheba; violator of hospitality customs; punitive judge of the transgressions of others. Second, David is the object of ironic attack with respect to his foolishness, in particular—a further instance of verbal irony. (Note that communicating the latter defect in David relies on connecting the story of David and Nabal with Nathan's Parable).

3.4.3 *2 Samuel 12:7–15a*

The following passage is not verbal irony for the reason that the criticism in these verses is explicit, and not hidden. Indeed, the criticism in this passage is direct and the reader has no doubt of the severity of the situation. The explicit criticism begins with the indicting words, אתה האישׁ (12:7). This reference creates a contrast between David, who is the man who is meant to follow divine laws, with Yahweh who is the God, and creator of the laws. Yahweh then makes the judgement in clear and unambiguous terms. This speech begins with a formal address from אלהי ישראל which means that David is being judged as a king, and this speech has implications for all of Israel.[72] Most importantly, David is shown to be the king because Yahweh has given him the kingship and all of the

72 Fokkelman, "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 83.

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trappings which come with it (12:7–8).[73] Therefore, although David is the king in this passage, Yahweh is the higher authority.[74]

The explicit criticism takes shape in 12:9 when Yahweh says,

> מדוע בזית את־דבר יהוה לעשׂות הרע בעיני
> (Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight?)[75]

The דבר יהוה refers to the law, which David has plainly disregarded.[76] This criticism, then, outlines David's infractions. David has 'despised' Yahweh for seeing Yahweh's authority as not worthy of obeying, and scorned God because David has acted as though God's authority is not worth fearing.[77] These judgements are in reference to David's order to execute Uriah, and his 'taking' of Bathsheba (12:9–10).

Verse 10 points to David's comment in 11:25b,

> אל־ירע בעיניך את־הדבר הזה כי־כזה וכזה תאכל ההרב
> (Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another.)[78]

This comment shows David to be completely oblivious of Yahweh's potential judgement, despite Yahweh's insistence that he would punish David for his iniquities (2 Sam. 7:14). Since Yahweh's warning is quite clear and yet David is oblivious to it, it follows that, David is being shown to be the fool. Clarity

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73 Yahweh's giving or favour to David is also expressed in Nathan's Oracle (2 Sam. 7) which although offering unconditional regard to the House of David, also contains God's warning, "When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings" (2 Sam. 7:14).

74 The root word נתן (12:8) contrasts with the rich man in the parable who takes (לקה) (12:4b) and with David who Yahweh accuses of 'taking' in verses 2 Samuel 12:9–10. This emphasis may suggest the fulfilment of Yahweh's warning that the king that Israel asked for will take Israel's sons and send them off to war (1 Sam. 8:11–12), take Israel's daughters as servants (1 Sam. 8:13), and take their possessions (1 Sam. 8:14–17). Therefore, it could be suggested that the allusions in the explicit criticism radiate out beyond David's misdeeds to include the establishment of the monarchy, and Israel's rejection of God in wanting a king like other nations to rule over them. (1 Sam. 8:7). Thereby, it may be argued that although David is the victim in this narrative, he is also symbolic of the monarchy in general.

75 Translation care of the NRS.

76 Cartledge, *SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel*, 517.

77 Janzen, "The Condemnation of David's 'taking' in 2 Samuel 12:1–14," 211.

78 Translation care of the *New King James Version*.

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is also evidenced in the revelation of Yahweh's punishment. Yahweh's punishment of David will be transparent in contrast to David's conspiracy with Uriah which was hidden from Israel. Yahweh will create trouble within David's house in front of *all* Israel (12:12) as opposed to *all* of Israel (2 Sam. 11:1) who were at war when David committed his transgressions.

At this juncture it would appear that David ceases to be the unknowing victim of irony as he develops a degree of self-awareness when he remarks, הטאתי ליהוה (12:13). However, Hugh Pyper is still doubtful in relation to David's self-awareness. Pyper suggests, "David both acknowledges and fails to acknowledge the hand of God in Nathan's intervention. 'I have sinned against the Lord,' he says in (12:13), but such recognition is not necessarily repentance. This ambivalence may be reflected in God's double-edged forgiveness."[79] David will not die for his transgressions, instead, David's הטא will be transferred onto the child of the illegitimate union who will die (12:13b–14).[80] Moreover, the text relates that the death of the child merely prevents David's death (12:14) and must be considered in addition to the punishment in 12:11. In 12:11 Yahweh's actions of raising calamity and the 'taking' of David's wives mirrors David's misdeeds, and also suggests that there will be a challenge to David's kingship, as taking a king's harem was one method of claiming the throne.[81]

3.4.4 *Samuel 12:15b–18*

In this and the following sections in this chapter we return to verbal irony. At the lower level of 12:15b Yahweh strikes Bathsheba's child to David. In 12:16 David pleads with God to spare the life of the child, and fasts and lies on the ground. In 12:18 the servants fear telling David that the child has died. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is an incongruity in David's behaviour towards the child. Thus far in the narrative David is shown not to care for the deaths of innocent people, however, in 12:16 David desperately implores Yahweh to show mercy to the child of his union with Bathsheba. This is somewhat suspicious, given that David is otherwise described as ambivalent about the child—indeed, he tried to trick another man into accepting the paternity of this child (11:6–13). Accordingly, the vision of David prostrating himself in the dirt, whilst the elders try to rouse him from his supplication

79 Hugh Pyper, "The Enticement to Re-read: Repetition as Parody in 2 Samuel," 163.

80 McCarter Jr. suggests that the preferable translation of the word העביר is 'transferred' as the essence of this Hebrew word is that sin has been forgiven but that it must still be atoned for. McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 301.

81 Ibid., 300.

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becomes somewhat comical by virtue of being an exaggerated event (an instance of overstatement in Muecke's terminology).

David is, therefore, the object of ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode of irony is impersonal. The sub-categories of impersonal irony are overstatement and the rhetorical question.

However, the claim that the language is overstated is contentious. The child dies on the seventh day (ביום־השביעי) which has prompted much discussion. Peter Coxon suggests that the reference to the seventh day may be an allusion to Bathsheba's name (ביום־שבע).[82] Veijola suggests that the term refers to the child's age at the time of the child's illness. McCarter, on the other hand suggests that this reference to seven days might signify 'proleptic' mourning, as seven days was the traditional mourning period.[83]

Yet, I argue that the time period of David's prostration is exaggerated and that the ironic device of overstatement is being used. This claim is supported by the rhetorical question in 12:18b. The rhetorical question indicates the fear that the servants have of telling David that the child is dead, for they worry that David will harm himself.[84] This indicates that David's supplication is exaggerated. It may also be suggested that this is a sarcastic jibe, as self-mutilation, although a customary mourning ritual in the Ancient Near East, was not permitted by the Israelites (Deut. 14:1). It was thought that the practice identified the mourner too closely with the dead person, rather than with the holiness of God.[85] Therefore, the object of ironic attack is David, and the ironic content is David's grand, yet token, act of obeisance. Furthermore, the ironist implicitly makes the pejorative criticism of David that the child has absorbed the punishment of death which David rightly should have suffered (12:13) and

82 Coxon, "A Note on 'Bathsheba' in 2 Samuel 12, 1–6," 249.

83 T. Veijola, "Salomo—der Erstgeborene Bathsebas," in, J. A. Emerton (ed.) *Studies in the Historical Books of the Old Testament.* (*VTSup 30*) 230–250 Leiden 1979, as cited in McCarter. *II Samuel*, 301.

84 This may also be seen as a case of observable irony where the reader is aware of information which is not known to some of the characters in the story. In this narrative the reader and David know that God has foreordained the child's death as atonement for David's sin. However, this information is not known to the servants in the story. Thereby, the servants, seem to view David as mourning excessively when the child is alive (which is not customary), and not mourning at all after the child's death (which is similarly out of custom), when it seems apparent the David is not mourning at all, but rather engages in an act of supplication. However, it is more persuasive to consider this an example of verbal irony, as there is a discernible object of ironic attack—David.

85 Walter J. Houston, "Leviticus," in, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans' Publishing Company, 2003), 101–124, 117–118.

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that this is yet another example of a life which has been ruined because of David's transgression.

3.4.5 *2 Samuel 12:19–20*

At the lower level of 12:19 David asks the servants if the child is dead, and the servants tell David that the child is dead. In 12:20 David arises, washes, anoints himself, and changes his clothes before going to the house of the Lord to worship. He then goes to his own house and eats. At the upper level of the narrative there is an implicit incongruity. For David who pleads excessively for the life of the child in 12:17, does not appear to mourn the child's death at all in 12:20.

David is the object of ironic attack as he is spoken of not only ironically but also disparagingly. He is also the unknowing victim of verbal irony. The grade of verbal irony is covert. The anomalous language is particularly notable in the cluster of words רחץ סוך אכל (12:20) which are otherwise used in biblical stories of feasts and festivities. The placement of these words, which are ordinarily associated with banquets, after the death of David's child emphasises what Diane Sharon calls a "contextual dissonance" between the expectations that the servants had of David, and David's behaviour in the narrative.[86]

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of impersonal irony is irony displayed, as the reader expects that David will mourn the loss of his child, but instead David feasts. However, there has been debate regarding the significance of David's lack of mourning after the death of the child, and this must be discussed further.

Most scholars agree that David's behaviour is not customary. Baruch Halpern suggests that this action is an example of David's 'modernity' and practical nature. He reasons that there is no point making a petition to God after the child has died, nor is there any point in mourning as the child cannot return.[87] This presupposes, however, that the point of mourning is to try and restore the dead back to life. David Bosworth argues that David's indifference is symptomatic of his psychological resilience which can be misinterpreted as cold-indifference but is rather a coping strategy for grief.[88] Yet, it would appear that in this narrative which contains parables and scant psychological data Bosworth's argument might be a case of over-interpretation. Moreover, this interpretation overlooks David's lacklustre character in the preceding chapter, and the

86 Diane M. Sharon, "When Fathers Refuse to Eat: The Trope of Rejecting Food and Drink in Biblical Narrative," *Semeia* (1999), 140.

87 Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons. Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 36–37.

88 David A. Bosworth, "Faith and Resilience: King David's Reaction to the Death of Bathsheba's Firstborn," *CBQ* 73, no. 4 (2011), 691–707, 692–693.

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general sense of criticism towards David which is woven into chapters 11 and 12. Bosworth's argument that children died often in the ancient world and that therefore attachment to them was weaker, is tenuous at best.[89] This argument does not explain the servants' surprise that David ate heartily when the child died (12:21). Nor does it explain why Bathsheba mourned (12:24). Sharon suggests that fasting is not a normative action associated with mourning in the OT, however, David typically does fast whilst mourning (2 Sam. 1:11–12; 1:15–16; 1:19–27; 3:28–39; 3:33–37).[90] Therefore, as David does not fast or weep after the child's death—indeed, he feasts—this would tend to indicate that David does not mourn for the child at all.[91] The clash of incompatibles—which is a necessary component of irony displayed—is as follows. David's knowledge of the death of the child (11:19) followed jarringly by David's act of feasting (11:20). The content (or broad object, in Muecke's terminology) of the irony is David's cool reaction to the child's death. This reaction alludes to David's indifference to Uriah's death in 11:25.

3.4.6 *2 Samuel 12:21–23*

At the lower level of 12:21 the servants ask David why he fasted when the child was alive, but then ate food as soon as the child died. In 12:22 David tells the servants that he was fasting because he believed that it might change God's mind. In 12:23 David tells the servants that he does not believe that there is any need to mourn, as mourning will not change the situation. At the upper level of the narrative there is an implication that David is a king who is self-interested, and is not remorseful concerning his crimes. Had David had an appreciation of the harmful impact of his sins, it would be expected that he would mourn for the child, particularly with the knowledge that his rightful punishment was transferred onto the baby. The opposition in the passage concerns the difference between what the servants say and what they mean in asking their rhetorical question.

David is the object of ironic attack as he is spoken to ironically and implicitly criticised. He is oblivious to the servants' concern (12:21) and here his own words betray him (12:22–23). He is, therefore, also an unknowing victim of this verbal irony. The irony is a simple irony manifesting a contrast between the

89 Bosworth, "Faith and Resilience: King David's Reaction to the Death of Bathsheba's Firstborn," 701.

90 Sharon, "When Fathers Refuse to Eat: The Trope of Rejecting Food and Drink in Biblical Narrative," 138–139.

91 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 164. Anderson also refutes the claim of Hertzberg that this is representative of a child sacrifice, and Fokkelman's claim that David mourns 'proleptically' for the child.

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lower explicit level and the upper implicit level. The grade of irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is the rhetorical question. The main criticism of David is contained in the servant's rhetorical question and statement of fact in 12:21, which is as follows:

> מה־הדבר הזה אשר עשיתה בעבור הילד חי צמת ותבך וכארי מת הילד קמת ותאכל לחם
>
> (What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.)[92]

The criticism of David inherent in this question has been explored in the previous section. However, in 12:22–23 David explains the reasons for his actions, and in doing so further demonstrates his uncaring nature and his lack of the appropriate emotional response of grief. Moreover, his use of three rhetorical questions, following on the servants' rhetorical question, amplifies the irony. David's first rhetorical question is in 12:22b,

> מי יודע יחנני יהוה וחי הילד
>
> (Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?)[93]

At first glance this sentence seems to be favourable to David, as it appears to express David's concern for the welfare of the child. However, it may also be interpreted to mean that David was requesting that God be 'gracious' to him, not merely by not killing the child, but more importantly (from David's perspective) by not following through with the additional punishments in store for David (listed in 12:13–14). For the child's death is only part of this punishment and one that is not directly harmful to David. Moreover, whether or not David is simply being self-interested, as I have suggested, is confirmed by an analysis of the rhetorical questions in 12:23,

> ועתה סת למה זה אני צמ האוכל להשׁיבו עוד
>
> (But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?)[94]

92 Translation care of the NRS.
93 Translation caer of the RSV.
94 Translation care of the RSV.

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Brueggemann argues that David mourns the child's death in a manner that is contrary to the conventions of the time, and that David has a revolutionary outlook on life and death. He suggests that David has learnt to live life as it comes, so to speak, and to embrace the freedom which comes with faith. Brueggemann's assessment, then, is that David's behaviour is a demonstration of "profound faith."[95] However, the problem with this proposition is that there is no evidence to suggest that David was so touched by the death of the baby. Indeed, the evidence is to the contrary: (2 Sam. 1:11–12; 1:15–16; 1:19–27; 3:28–39; 3:33–37). These verses indicate that David is not mourning the death of the child. Moreover, the rhetorical question in 12:23, which suggests David's lack of caring for the child, is not unlike David's reaction to the news of Uriah's death (2 Sam. 11:25). Accordingly, we should conclude that David is the object of ironical attack and that the focus of the ironist's criticism is the lack of concern that the king has for his subjects. David appears to view the death of the child who absorbed his sin, as unworthy of mourning, and Uriah's execution as collateral damage.

3.4.7 *2 Samuel 12:24–25*

The verses 12:24–25 do not readily show forth irony. Fokkelman argues that these verses indicate that David had begun to envision Bathsheba as his wife to be respected, and that peace had finally come about after the tragedy of the Uriah affair. Bathsheba is referred to as David's wife, instead of the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and David's actions in this verse, contrast with his cold behaviour in 11:27.[96] Heinz Fabry, on the other hand, is rather scathing. He writes that David's 'consoling' of Bathsheba is nothing more than a veiled sexual advance. Fabry is also quick to mention that David's act of consoling of Hanun (2 Sam. 10:3) can be considered 'suspect'.[97] The fact that two very different interpretations arise in these verses suggests the presence of ambiguity in the text. Note that ambiguity is an indicator of irony. Yet, the other criteria for verbal irony are not readily apparent.

3.4.8 *2 Samuel 12:26–29*

At the lower level of 12:26, it is reported that Joab had fought successfully against the Ammonites. In 12:27–28 Joab sends a messenger to tell David to

95 Walter Brueggemann, *David and his Theologian* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011), 52–53.

96 Fokkelman, "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 91–92.

97 Heinz Fabry, "נחם" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. IX, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck et al., trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 331–354, 352.

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collect the rest of the people and take the town or else he, Joab, will do so and name the city after himself. In 12:29 David collects his people and takes the city. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist is implicitly communicating the incongruity that David, who was once a great warrior leader is now being told what to do by his general. The opposition in the narrative is between what Joab says, and the implicit message in Joab's speech. David is the object of ironic attack and is also the unknowing victim of the irony.

The irony is a simple irony between the levels. At the lower level Joab tells David to take the city or Joab will take it and name it after himself. This utterance can be assumed to be a mere statement of fact and provision of advice and encouragement at the lower and explicit level. However, at the upper and implicit level, given Joab is David's subordinate, Joab's statement manifests contempt. The grade of irony is overt as the criticism is immediately obvious.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is pretended advice or encouragement of the victim. In this category the advice which is given in the lower level of the narrative may seem like good advice to the victim of the irony. However, in the upper level of the narrative the advice brings with it pejorative criticism. Arguably, David overlooks the pejorative element, given it is good advice and the situation is urgent. Therefore, he is an unknowing victim.

In the following section the pretended advice is found in Joab's comment to David in 12:27b–28,

> נלחמתי ברבה גם־לכדתי את־עיר המים:
> ועתה אסף את־יתר העם וחנה על־העיר ולכדה פן־אלכד אני את־העיר ונקרא שמי עליה:
> (I have fought against Rabah; moreover, I have taken the city of waters. Now, then, gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it; lest I take the city, and it be called by my name.)[98]

The repetition of the first-person pronoun in 12:27, and the reference to I myself **אני** in 12:28 hint at an ironic exaggeration. Joab says, '*I* have fought … *I* have taken … or *I* will take the city, and it will be called by *my name*' (12:27b–28). This emphasis on what Joab has done highlights what David did not do in 11:1 and builds on the irony in that verse. The ironist at the upper level of the narrative is therefore, not only critical of David for not leading the army out to war (11:1), but also for only managing to join in the fighting at the final stages and as a result of Joab's advice and encouragement. This advice and encouragement may

98 Translation care of the RSV.

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be considered to be pretended as it is accompanied by a profound criticism, and is not merely advice and/or encouragement. If it was merely advice and/or encouragement, there would not be an emphasis on what Joab has done (12:27), in contrast to what David had not done and was expected to do. The object of ironic attack is David who is also the unknowing victim of irony. The ironic content is David's absence from the war and, therefore, David's breaking of his covenant with the Israelites.

3.4.9 *2 Samuel 12:30–31*

At the lower level of 12:30 David takes a crown and puts it on his head. He also takes the spoils of war. In 12:31 David deals with the Ammonite people in the city (either by torturing or enslaving them), and then returns to Jerusalem. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implicitly communicates the incongruity between David's behaviour and the expectations that the Israelites had of their kings. David is the object of ironic attack.

The grade of the irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent and is conveyed in the ambiguous language in the narrative. The ambiguous language is best recognised in the following example. The crown that David places on his head is described as being ככר זהב which is approximately the weight of a man.[99] In terms of verbal irony this exaggerated situation is an overstatement and it is used to make a pejorative criticism of the protagonist of the story. This interpretation relies on the contrast between the decadent vision of David putting on an oversized crown and the Israelites hope for a king in 1 Samuel 8:20,

> והיינו גם־אנחנו ככל־הגוים ושפטנו מלכנו ויצא לפנינו ונלחם את־מלחמתנו
> (… that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.)[100]

Gnana Robinson even suggests that the implicit criticism in this verse is that David has become a "king like a king of the other nations."[101]

Yet, there is debate concerning the interpretation of the word מלכם. Some translations favour the translation *Milcom* whereas others, consider *malkam* to be the correct interpretation. The reason for the uncertainty stems from the weight of the crown, which has been described as seventy-pounds, and too

99 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 313.

100 Translation care of NKJ.

101 Gnana Robinson, *1&2 Samuel. Let us be Like the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 216.

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large for a person to wear.[102] The most popular argument then appears to be that the crown was the crown which sat atop the statue of Milcom the God of the Ammonites.[103] Joyce Baldwin is critical of the suggestion that David would have put the crown of the Ammonite God on his head.[104] However, this interpretation is consistent with satire, as there could be no greater way to ridicule David than to have him wear the crown of a different God. Moreover, even if the interpretation of מלכם is 'their king', and not Milcom, the text still manifests pejorative criticism of David as he symbolically puts on the crown of a different nation.

The narrative lingers over the event of David putting the crown on his head, by including excessive detail of the crown. This information is an overstatement. For instance,

> ויקה את־עטרת ־מלכם מעל ראשו ומשקלה ככר זהב ואבן יקרה (12:30)
> (He took the crown of Milcom from his head; and its weight was a talent of gold and it had precious stones; and it was set on David's head.)[105]

This same overstated language is also found in the excessive detail of what David did to the people of Rabbah.

> ואת־העם אשר־בה הוציא וישם במגרה ובחרצי הברזל ובמגזרת הברזל (12:31) והעביר אותם במלכן
> (And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln …) Note, here I use the translation from the King James Version which allows for the possibility that David did not set the people of Rabbah to work, but rather had them tortured.

Therefore, the mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of irony is overstatement. The use of ironic overstatement is used to draw attention to the incongruity in the text. In these verses the incongruity consists in the contrast between the expectations that the Israelites and Yahweh had for a king,

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102 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 313.

103 John Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 257; Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 245; S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 294; W. McKane, *I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 235; Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 168.

104 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 'footnote,' 246.

105 Author's translation.

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and David's actual behaviour. It has already been argued that David has not been a just king who leads the Israelites out to war (11:1). The image of David taking the city only when Joab pressures him to leave Jerusalem (12:28) reinforces this criticism. The image of David putting on the Ammonite crown escalates this criticism to the level of ridicule.

This criticism may also be extended to include David's efficiency in taking the spoils of war. Brueggemann suggests that David is a 'taker' but that in this instance his behaviour is completely appropriate. For taking the spoils of war is acceptable behaviour in war. Moreover, there appears to be no such criticism in this part of the narrative.[106] However, although there is no explicit criticism in this narrative, it may be argued that there is verbal irony in this passage, that it is covert, and that it implies that David is not living up to expectations. This latter interpretation comes into view when we consider Yahweh's rejection of Saul as a king who enjoyed the spoils of war and disobeyed the word of Yahweh (1 Sam. 15:10–33). This rejection of Saul is followed directly by the anointing of David as king (1 Sam. 15:34–16:13). The anointing of David implies that there was an expectation that David would not act as Saul did—i.e. would not take the spoils of war—and would, therefore, not be rejected by Yahweh.

In 12:31 David and *all* of the people returned victorious to Jerusalem. This alludes to 11:1 when all of the people went out to war, yet David remained in Jerusalem. This strengthens the evidence for the claim that the dominant subcategory in this section is an overstatement of events which builds on the criticism in 11:1. The material in 12:31 also offers a further criticism of David, namely, that he delighted in the spoils of war.

In summation the object of ironic attack in 12:30–31 is David. The ironic content is that David puts on the crown of another God (or nation) while continuing to be a transgressor of the laws of the God of the Israelites, despite acknowledging his sin in 12:13.

3.4.10 *Summary of Irony in 2 Samuel 11–27b–12:31*

11:27b is the explicit criticism of David by Yahweh, which confirms the ironist's hidden criticism. 12:1–6 is an instance of irony by analogy, where the stories of David and Nabal, and David, Uriah and Bathsheba join together to unravel the story of Nathan's Parable. In this episode David is criticised implicitly for taking Bathsheba, having Uriah executed, not showing proper hospitality to Uriah, and for making punitive and excessive legal judgements. The commentary in 12:7–15a is God's direct criticism of David for taking Bathsheba, and ordering Uriah's execution. This section also reveals God's judgement on David.

106 Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 285.

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Part of this judgement is the death of the child who was conceived in the illegitimate union between David and Bathsheba. The criticism in 12:15b–18 concerns the overstatement of David's act of supplication, which appears to be a token gesture. This is confirmed in the following section where David is shown not to mourn for the child who dies. The ironist's criticism in 12:19–20 is therefore, that David is indifferent to the suffering of the people who suffer from the consequences of his decisions not to follow the laws of Israel. This pejorative criticism follows through to 12:21–23 where David is shown to be unrepentant and self-interested. The commentary in 12:26–29 reminds the reader of the incompatibility in 2 Samuel 11:1 where David did not go out to war with the Israelites. In this instance, David meets the Israelites in the final stages of the battle, but only after Joab's asks him to, which suggests that the sub-category of irony in this instance is pretended advice or encouragement of the victim. This criticism continues in 12:30–31, which also contains the incongruity that David enjoyed the spoils of war, contrary to the knowledge that it was for this reason that Saul was rejected by Yahweh. The pejorative criticism of David in 2 Samuel 12 is more explicit than the criticism in 2 Samuel 11, which is predominantly hidden. This explicit criticism then reinforces the hidden criticism in the previous chapter, and adds further stories of David's actions which suggest that David is not a just king.

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CHAPTER 4

Amnon's Sin and Absalom's Revenge

4.1 2 Samuel 13:1–39

4.1.1 *2 Samuel 13:1–4*

At the lower level of 13:1 the reader is told that Amnon fell in love with his half-sister Tamar. Being his sister, Tamar was not sexually available to Amnon. Moreover, in 13:2 the reader is made aware that Tamar is a virgin and therefore sexually unavailable to Amnon for a second reason. In 13:3 we are told that Amnon had a crafty friend called Jonadab, who asks Amnon why he looks so weak (13:4). Amnon responds to Jonadab that he loves Tamar, Absalom's sister (13:4). The implicit message at the upper level of the narrative is that Amnon wished to have sex with Tamar. The opposition in the narrative emerges in the difference between what is said and what is meant. It is explicitly stated that Amnon *loved* Tamar and that she was a virgin—something which frustrated Amnon. However, there is an insinuation in the narrative that Amnon's interest in his sister is morally unacceptable. This irony is covert and the ironic content is implied by the use of anomalous language together with allusions to the background story of David and Bathsheba.

Take for instance Amnon's response to Jonadab, which is as follows:

> ויאמר לו אמנון את־תמר אחות אבשלם אחי אני אהב (13:4b)
> (Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister.")[1]

The unusual word order mentions Tamar's relationship with Absalom before the verb אהב.[2] This word order then emphasizes Absalom's relationship to Tamar or, in other words, repeats the understanding that Tamar *belongs* to Absalom. The emphasis is significant to the reader who remembers the rich man's act of taking the lamb in Nathan's Parable (2 Sam. 12:4), and God's judgement against David for taking Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:9). The presence of אני in this section emphasizes Amnon and implies that Amnon is set to be the 'taker' in this instance.

At the upper level of the text the ironist insinuates that Amnon will make the same error as David (by having an illicit sexual encounter). The ironist also

1 Translation care of the NRS.

2 "love".

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draws attention to the possible consequences of this action. David, as the King of Israel was disobedient to the laws of Israel, and thereby, sinned against God, and threatened the order in Israel.[3] The reader can now assume that Amnon, who is the next in line to the throne is about to do the same thing. In these terms Amnon is clearly the object of ironic attack. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal. The sub-category of impersonal irony is insinuation, as the ironist anticipates that Amnon is going to do something immoral as a consequence of his frustrated desire, especially when considered in the context of David's sexual transgression in chapters 2 Samuel 11–12.

4.1.2 *2 Samuel 13:5–7*

At the lower level of 13:5 Jonadab tells Amnon to pretend to be sick in order that Amnon can get close to Tamar. In 13:6 Amnon enacts Jonadab's plan, and in 13:7 David—believing Amnon to be sick—sends Tamar to Amnon's house to prepare food for him. Our background knowledge (prior to the SN) is that David is extremely astute and not easily tricked. Accordingly, the irony of this incongruity is implied at the upper level of the narrative. David is the object of ironic attack and also the unknowing victim of the irony.

The grade of irony is covert, and is implied in the language in the passage. The different wording in the requests for Tamar to tend to Amnon are particularly relevant to the irony. Amnon's implementation of Jonadab's plan diverges from Jonadab's original intention. Jonadab has in mind that Tamar and, for that matter, David be deceived. However, it is by no means clear that Jonadab envisages that Amnon rape Tamar, as in fact Amnon does. Jonadab's outline of the plan is verbose and rich in sensual imagery (לעיני, אכל מידה),[4] and he suggests that Amnon request of David that Tamar perform הבריה for him (13:5). It has been argued that הבריה is not merely food but a healing ritual which was carried out by women.[5] This is consistent with the deception that Amnon is ill. Moreover, by adding the sensual allusions in his account of the healing ritual, Jonadab presents the plan as also involving a somewhat seductive aspect and in doing so he manifests a degree of subtlety and sophistication. However, Amnon fails to grasp the subtlety. Amnon's request to David is inappropriate and potentially counter-productive. His communication is coarse and carries a sexual connotation that nearly gives the game away (13:6). Amnon does not

3 Phillips, "Another Look at Adultery," 3–25.

4 "In my sight" "Eat them from her hand".

5 Adrien Janis Bledstein, "Was Habbirya a Healing Ritual Performed by a Woman in King David's House?" *Biblical Research* 38 (1992), 15–31, 15. Bledstein writes that the definite article indicates the name of the ritual and the name of the food offering, 16.

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ask for הבריה to be performed, but rather asks that Tamar create for him לבבות which may be hearty or heart-shaped cakes. There is a sexual connotation to the word לבבות.[6] On the other hand, David merely instructs Tamar to prepare הבריה for Amnon, which suggests that David has missed the sexual overtones in Amnon's request (13:7).

David's words to Tamar begin with לכי which is a royal order (13:7).[7] This royal command gives effect to Amnon's deception of Tamar and is given without insight or due consideration. Accordingly, David is presented as a fool.[8] The familiar word שלח precedes David's foolish command (13:7) and, thereby, connects this event with David's other transgressions (2 Sam. 11:1, 3, 4, 6, 14)—transgressions in which David is shown to be a king who does not make commands with good judgement.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony. The sub-category is the pretended defence of the victim since David is deceived in the narrative, and the ironist pretends to defend David's foolishness by presenting him as being at the mercy of a conspirator, namely Jonadab, who is חכם מאד.[9] David's foolishness is then in stark contrast to the wisdom or craftiness of Jonadab who created the ruse. Mark Gray stresses this obliviousness of David when he suggests, "… David is either presented as innocent to the point of gross naivety or blind to a degree that stretches credulity."[10] McCarter merely suggests, "… there is no violence or vengeance in him, but he is carelessly compliant (13:7)."[11] It is expected of the king that he be astute and judicious and certainly not careless. Given that a reasonable person would be expected to see through the deception, the defence of David is merely pretended. In this category, according to Muecke, the victim of irony is 'defended' in the ironist's faux-support. On my revised analysis of Muecke, the object of ironic attack—who in this case is also an unknowing victim—is defended in the ironist's faux-support. The effect of this, is to point to David's extreme foolishness.[12] The opposition in this sub-category then, is that the unknowing victim is being defended at the lower level, and criticized pejoratively at the upper level.

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6 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 322.

7 Mark Gray, "Amnon: a chip off the Old Block? Rhetorical Strategy 13.7–15 the Rape of Tamar and the Humiliation of the Poor," *JSOT* 77 (1998), 43.

8 Ibid.

9 "Very wise". The word הכם can mean wise or crafty. It is traditionally translated to mean crafty, as craftiness is not dependant on morality. It may be argued that this designation of Jonadab as wise is ironic, given that his plan has disastrous results for the royal family.

10 Ibid.

11 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 327.

12 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 73.

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4.1.3 *2 Samuel 13:8–9*

At the lower level of 13:8 Tamar goes to Amnon's house and bakes cakes for him. In 13:9 Amnon refuses to eat the cakes and sends everybody except for Tamar out of his house. At the upper level the ironist implies that Amnon is about to mistreat Tamar, and cross the boundaries of acceptable social standards in Israel during this period. Moreover, this passage contrasts Tamar's genuine act of hospitality with Amnon's lack of חסד.

There is an opposition in the narrative between what is said and what is meant. The author gives a detailed explicit account of Tamar's labours and contrasts them with Amnon's abrupt action of sending away everyone but Tamar. The author does not explicitly say that Tamar is innocent and Amnon morally culpable; nevertheless, this is implied. The ironic content is that Amnon is about to violate hospitality laws and harm Tamar, notwithstanding her conscientious compliance with these laws in Amnon's interest. Amnon is the object of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert and is, therefore, conveyed through the language used and the background information provided in the text.

As far as the language is concerned, 13:8–9 follows the same pattern of verbosity and then curtness as has already been described in verses 11:1 et al. To begin with, the wordiness of 13:8–9a can be found in the belaboured description of Tamar's food preparation. Bar-Efrat observes,

> It should be noted, however, that the narrator presents events to us relatively slowly (again, thereby heightening the tension): details are recorded to such an extent that instead of 'and she kneaded the dough' we find, 'And she took dough and kneaded it', and instead of 'and she emptied the pan out before him' we read, 'And she took the pan and emptied it out before him'.[13]

This verbosity creates the image of Tamar labouring to prepare food for Amnon. This image is in contrast with the image of Amnon who is presented as lounging around and feigning illness (13:8a). The prolonged effort that Tamar puts into food preparation is wasted as Amnon refuses to eat (13:9). There is also an implication that Tamar's conscientious efforts to benefit Amnon are also to be wasted, albeit in a far more serious sense since he is about to cause her great harm.

The curtness is found in the indicting sentence, הוציאו כל־איש מעלי (13:9b) (And every man went out from him).[14] Given what the reader already knows

13 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 256.

14 Author's translation.

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of Amnon's strong sexual desire toward Tamar (13:1–2), and his plan (expressed earlier with sexual overtones) to get Tamar into his house (13:6), Amnon's request to be left alone with Tamar creates suspicion. The curt sentence in this linguistic context together with the background knowledge of his plan generate the implication that he is about to do Tamar harm. So, we have an example of the sub-category of insinuation. The reader expects Amnon to harm Tamar, because of what the reader has learned of Amnon's character, and because we are now at the stage of Amnon's plan where he intends to engage in sexual intercourse with her (presumably whether she consents to it or not).

Furthermore, the insinuation that Amnon is going to harm Tamar links Amnon further with David, and David's transgressions. For instance, in 2 Samuel 12:12 Yahweh protests that David has sinned in secret, e.g. with respect to Bathsheba. In the context of the knowledge of David's secret sin and the insinuation that Amnon is about to harm Tamar—and do so in secret, since having commanded others to leave the house, he and Tamar are alone (13:9b)—the reader anticipates that Amnon will make a similar error to the one made by his father. This anticipation is strengthened by the presence of the superfluous report in the verse that everybody followed the prince's order and left the chamber (13:9c). This episode also foreshadows the ire of Yahweh in relation to Amnon, given Yahweh's ire in relation to David. The content of the irony is Amnon's violation of Tamar's hospitality, in the context of her provision of hospitality to him, along with the insinuation that Amnon is about to harm Tamar in secret.

Of note, although Tamar is 'tricked' she is not the unknowing victim of verbal irony (as David was in the previous section), as Tamar is not 'confidently' unaware of what is going on. Or in other words, there is no hubris in Tamar's character at this stage of the narrative.

4.1.4 *2 Samuel 13:10–11*

At the lower level of 13:10 Amnon asks Tamar to bring him the cakes she has made. In 13:11 Amnon restrains Tamar and tells her to lie with him. At the upper level there is an implication that he is about to rape his own sister. While there is an explicit reference to the family relationship between Amnon and Tamar, the use of anomalous language adds emphasis. In 13:10 it states that Tamar brings the cakes to אמנון אחיה.[15] In 13:11 Amnon says, בואי שכבי עמי אחותי.[16] At this point a further implication at the upper level of the narrative is that it is the Prince of Israel that is about to commit his heinous act of raping his own

15 "Amnon her brother".

16 "Come lie with me, my sister."

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sister. Such an act is of great significance since it threatens all of Israel. For Amnon has proven that he is not interested in upholding the laws which protect Israel yet he is next in line to be king. Moreover, he has no concern for his own sister. It follows that he cannot be trusted to be a just king for the rest of the community.

There is an incongruity between the levels. At the lower level Tamar is handing out cakes and being told to lie down with Amnon in what is a seemingly banal episode. However, at the upper level it is implied that the Prince of Israel is about to rape his own sister which is an evil act of profound significance. The ironist feigns innocence of the significance of Amnon's act by merely describing the handing out of cakes and emphasizing the family relationship while not explicitly stating that Amnon is about to rape his sister, much less condemning him for this act. However, the ironist is actually implying that there is about to be a rape and that Amnon should be condemned for this. Amnon is the object of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert and, therefore, uncovered by recourse to the language and background information in the text. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is understatement.

Of particular interest is the understatement of Amnon's action of restraining Tamar and telling her to lie with him given it is, after all, a rape. This understating of the event is facilitated by the prior somewhat repetitive discussion of the trivial matter of the preparation of cakes. The use of these rhetorical devices continues the pattern of verbosity followed by a curt statement (see 11:1). The verbosity also draws attention to the well-intentioned and conscientious labour of Tamar, and the contrasting lack of חסד in Amnon. The verbosity in this section is in 13:10–11a, and curt language is in 13:11b:

בואי שכבי עמי אחותי

(Come lie with me, my sister.)[17]

The repetition of the *yod* at the end of each of these words produces a rhythm which emphasizes each word in this highly significant single sentence and, thereby, emphasises what the sentence implies—that Amnon is about to rape Tamar.[18]

17 Translation care of the KJV.

18 Of note, Mark Gray suggests that Amnon's decision not to eat the cakes that Tamar made for him (13:9, 11), can be contrasted with David's decision to fast for the life of the illegitimate child born from his union with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:17). For Gray, David's decision to fast is honourable, whereas, Amnon's reasons for fasting are deceitful. This proposition suggests that Amnon was more corrupted than David (Gray, "Amnon: a chip off the Old

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4.1.5 *2 Samuel 13:12–13*

The message of Tamar's words in 13:12–13b is overt. Tamar's plea for Amnon not to rape her is immediately apprehended and forceful, as would be expected. This is evident by the number of negations which appear in 13:12. For instance, the words אל or לא appear a total of four times in this verse. Moreover, it is made evident in Tamar's response to Amnon that what Amnon is intending to do, namely, rape Tamar is a sin, and contrary to the social customs of the day. This warning is evident in the following verses:

(13:12) לא־יעשה כן בישראל אל־תעשה את־הנבלה הזאת
(… no such thing should be done in Israel, do not do this sacriledge).[19]

(13:13) ואני אנה אוליך את־חרפתי
(And where could I take me shame?)[20]

Tamar's direct moral criticism of Amnon strengthens the notion of the ironist's implied criticism in the previous sections relating to this rape. However, despite the clarity and force of Tamar's pleas for Amnon not to rape her, the nature of Tamar's explicitly proposed solution to her predicament is problematic. Note that her predicament is as follows. She is about to be raped by her brother. However, according to most biblical scholars her brother cannot provide restitution by marrying her since marriage between siblings is forbidden. Moreover, no-one else will marry her because she has been raped. Accordingly, she faces a bleak future. Her own explicitly proposed solution to this predicament is problematic. For instance, in 13:13c Tamar begs Amnon to talk to the king as she is convinced that the king will permit a marriage between the two. However, this is against the laws which prohibit incest (Lev. 18:9, 11, 20:17 and Deut. 27:22). Upon saying this, it is worth noting that this is an area of contentious debate. The major concerns are outlined in McCarter's four propositions below.

(1) The laws of Lev. 18:9, 11 were not in effect in the time of David. In this case Tamar's words are a forthright appeal for reason, and Aminon's crime consists 'not in casting his eyes on his half-sister, but by violating her without having contracted a marriage and contracting no

Block? Rhetorical Strategy 13.7–15 the Rape of Tamar and the Humiliation of the Poor," 46–47). However, Gray's claim can be disputed. I have previously argued for David's manipulative reasons for fasting, and his coolness in not mourning for the child that died in section 2.2.5.

19 Author's translation.

20 Author's translation.

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> marriage after violating her' (Daube 1947:79). (2) The laws were in effect but not recognized in Jerusalem. In this case Tamar's words are, as in the first case, a sincere appeal, and Aminon's crime rape, not incest (Conroy 1978:17–18 n.3) ... (3) The laws were in effect in Jerusalem, but their purpose was not to regulate marriage but to prevent casual intercourse with women a man could expect to encounter in his household. In this case Tamar's words are again an appeal for reason, and Aminon is guilty of violating the laws of Lev 18 but, because he could not have married her, not of committing incest (Phillips 1975:239) (4) The laws were in full effect. In this case Tamar's words, unless she is temporizing, imply that David would have been willing to permit the marriage despite its illegality, and Aminon is guilty of both rape and incest.[21]

All of the examples discussed can be divided into two sets of interpretations, (1) that marriage between siblings was legal, and (2) that it was not. The content of the narrative provides strong evidence in favour of (2), i.e. that marriage between siblings was not legal. First, Jonadab—who is a wise man—devises a plan to deceive the King in order to enable Amnon to express his love for his sister, Tamar, who is also the King's daughter. Why would wise Jonabad recommend such a devious and potentially dangerous course of action if sexual relations and marriage between siblings was not forbidden? Second, why does Amnon not express his love for Tamar openly and directly, if sexual relations and marriage between siblings was not forbidden?

Let us assume, then, that marriage between siblings is unlawful. In this scenario, Tamar knows that Amnon knows not only that incest is a crime, but also that he would not be able to make restitution for his crime of raping Tamar by means of marriage to her (Deut. 22:28–29), for she also knows that he knows that marriage between siblings is unlawful.[22] The question that now arises is why Tamar proposes marriage to Amnon as the solution, given that marriage between siblings, and, therefore, an ongoing incestuous relationship involving procreation, is unlawful. Tamar not only strongly recommends marriage as the solution but chastises Amnon for disregarding the prohibition against

21 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 323–324. Note, McCarter suggests that the spelling אמינון in 2 Sam 13:20 points to the translation Aminon. McCarter argues that "defective spelling," אמנון has led to the popular translation Amnon. I follow the translation Amnon as this translation is generally accepted in scholarship.

22 I note that the other elements of the restitution which would be applicable if Amnon were to rape Tamar are that he must pay a large bride price, and relinquish the right to divorce the her (Deut. 22:28–29).

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rape. Indeed, as I argue below, she claims his action amounts to sacrilege. The upshot of this is that Tamar urges Amnon to choose unlawful marriage over unlawful rape, i.e. an ongoing incestuous relationship involving procreation over a one-off forcible act of incest. However, in Israel during this period—we must now assume—an ongoing incestuous relationship involving procreation is regarded as morally worse than a one-off forcible act of incest. Thus, ironically, Tamar is oblivious to the fact that in reprimanding Amnon for his imminent unlawful action she is simultaneously proposing an alternative course of action that is also unlawful—indeed a course of action that is regarded as a more serious offence. Moreover, her solution would involve the complicity of the King.

The scenario is consistent with Muecke's sub-category of verbal irony, pretended defence of the victim. At the lower (explicit) level of the narrative Tamar chastises Amnon for forcing himself upon her. Also, at the lower level she offers a solution to the problem, namely, marriage between siblings—an unlawful course of action. At the upper (implicit) level it is implied that Tamar herself is prepared to disregard the law and have others, notably the King, disregard the law. Thus, the conflict in the narrative is between, on the one hand, Tamar presenting herself as a *righteous* person who is about to be wronged and, on the other, the *unrighteous* course of action that she proposes in order to avert the wrong. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that Tamar is about to be wronged, she is the object of ironic attack. Moreover, she is also an unknowing victim of the irony. This is an instance of pretended defence of the victim, since the ironist pretends to be characterising Tamar as a righteous person while in fact drawing attention to her lack of righteousness. I note that this interpretation is challenging as it is critical of Tamar's response to her rapist whilst she is in the process of being raped. However, the crude and grotesque nature of this interpretation is consistent with satire. Indeed, grotequeries are non-essential features of satire.

Also, of note in this section is the emphasis on the word נבלה. In 13:12 Tamar warns Amnon not to be a נבלה. This mention of the נבלה leads onto Tamar's rhetorical question whereby Tamar repeats the word נבלה. In 13:13 Tamar warns Amnon once again not to be one of the הנבלים בישׂראל. The word נבל in isolation is ordinarily translated 'folly.' Better still, the word נבלה is considered 'sacrilege,' which points to a transgression which destroys existing relationships and order.[23] The נבלה applies to a person who is not in the right relationship with God in his thoughts and actions, with the consequence that the disadvantaged suffer since the fool disregards the interests of the community (Isa. 32:6).

23 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 322–323.

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This kind of person relates to 'Nabal,' who rejected important social norms and paid the price of his life for his foolishness (1 Sam. 25:2–44).

It was claimed in my interpretation of Nathan's Parable that the analogy of Nathan's Parable to the story of David and Nabal allowed for a nuanced interpretation of the analogy of David with the rich man in Nathan's Parable. In my interpretation, David was not only pejoratively criticized for taking Bathsheba and having Uriah killed, but also for his violation of hospitality customs. I now suggest that the story of David and Nabal is alluded to in the Amnon/Tamar episode. Certainly, Tamar's plea to Amnon not to rape her is reminiscent of Abigail's plea to David in 1 Sam. 25:25 not to kill Nabal. In 1 Sam. 25:25 the word נבל is mentioned twice and the word נבלה is mentioned once.

Given this allusion to Nabal, and the parallels between Amnon and David as transgressors,[24] arguably Amnon is condemned alongside David, not only because Amnon's transgression was preordained as a consequence of David's transgressions (12:11) but also because Amnon is a transgressor in his own right and, as such, condemned by God (as David was). This connection between Amnon and David is implied by virtue of Amnon being connected to "the rich man" in Nathan's Parable. For both the rich man and Amnon have breached hospitality customs (12:7). For his part Amnon violates Tamar's hospitality. In addition, both the rich man and Amnon take another man's 'property', for instance, the lamb in the case of the rich man, Tamar in the case of Amnon. Crucially, the rich man is condemned by God for his transgressions. Therefore, by implication, Amnon is also condemned by God. This aligns Amnon with David as a transgressor condemned by God. And, of course, Amnon is aligned with David by virtue of serial transgressors of God's laws.

4.1.6 *2 Samuel 13:14*

The information in 13:14 is clear, namely, Amnon rapes Tamar. However, given all of the detail which has been presented in previous verses regarding Jonadab's plan (13:3–7), Tamar's preparation of the food (13:8), and Tamar's plea to Amnon (13:12–13), the account of Amnon's rape of Tamar is all too brief. Thereby, the verbal irony in this instance is covert, impersonal irony that uses the sub-category understatement. The principal object of ironic attack

24 Moreover, there is a similarity in the law which David transgressed, and the laws which pertain to virgins. For example, the laws which discuss sexual transgressions that involve adultery, and sex with virgins are found in Deut. 22:13–30. It could be suggested that this cluster of laws are concerned with sexual purity. The maintenance of sexual purity in ancient Israel was important as it was believed to keep order in families and keep evil out of the greater society. J. Harold Ellens, *Sex in the Bible. A New Consideration* (London, Praeger Publications, 2006), 71.

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is Amnon. The incongruity in the narrative is the brevity of the report of the rape—an extremely important event—in the context of the detailed and lengthy recording of less significant events. Understatement emphasizes the pejorative criticism of Amnon by the ironist that is implicitly communicated at the upper level of the narrative. The brevity of the report of the rape surprises the reader, causes a re-rereading and, thereby, emphasises the damning nature of the information.

Regarding the understated language it is worth noting the extent of the transgressions which are contained in this brief verse. For instance, Amnon has just committed rape and incest, and possibly shown contempt for an important sacred rite, if Bledstein's suggestion that Tamar was doing הבריה[25] is believed. Therefore, it would be expected that this event would be spoken of in much greater detail.

4.1.7 *2 Samuel 13:15*

The irony which is specific to this narrative is that of misrepresentation or false statement. Muecke notes that this form of impersonal, verbal irony is evident when a person asserts something which is known to be false, but relies on the reader's prior knowledge of what is written in the text in order to convey the contradiction.[26] At the lower level we are told of Amnon's change of feelings for Tamar (13:15). Yet, most scholars interpret this verse as evidence that Amnon did not love Tamar at all and that he was only struck by lustful feelings for her.[27] Given the turn of events, including the rape, it might be judicious to hold that Amnon certainly did not love Tamar. However, that is no reason to interpret אהבה as 'lust' (as the SBL NRSV Bible does). At the upper level the word 'love' is used as a misrepresentation, which ridicules Amnon's declaration that he loved Tamar (13:4). The opposition in the narrative is between the explicit message that Amnon's love turned to hatred and the implied truth that Amnon never really loved Tamar. Rape is not an act of love. Amnon is then the object of the ironic attack here. Amnon's hatred of Tamar is emphasized in the repetition of the word שנאה, and the adjective [מאד] גדולה (13:15).[28]

25 Bledstein, "Was Habbirya a Healing Ritual Performed by a Woman in King David's House?" 31.

26 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 73.

27 Gray, "Amnon: a chip off the Old Block? Rhetorical Strategy 13.7–15 the Rape of Tamar and the Humiliation of the Poor," 50.

28 "Very great hatred". Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 266.

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4.1.8 *2 Samuel 13:17–19*

At the lower level of 13:17 Amnon calls a servant and commands him to lock Tamar out of the house. In 13:18 the reader is told of the royal virgin's robe that Tamar was wearing. In 13:19 Tamar intentionally tears the robe, puts ashes on her head and weeps. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist emphasises Tamar's new status, i.e. that she is no longer a prized royal virgin but rather an unwanted victim of incestuous rape. The incongruity in the narrative is between the violation, discarding and humiliation of the prized royal virgin, on the one hand, and on the other, the unnecessary and belaboured description of Tamar's robe.

As mentioned, the irony is emphasized in the unnecessary description of Tamar's robe. At the lower level the mention of Tamar's robe is purely informative as it merely tells us she was wearing the robe that royal virgins wore. Yet, the reader already knows who Tamar is, because of all of the family references in the story. Therefore, the emphasis on the royal robe is unnecessary unless this mention is to stress Tamar's royal virginity before her act of tearing the robe signifying that she is no longer a virgin.

The grade of verbal irony is covert. The mode of irony is impersonal, and the dominant sub-category of impersonal irony is overstatement. The overstatement consists of the detailed account of Tamar's' robe. Amnon is the object of attack since not only has Amnon raped his sister, but also a royal virgin. The ironic content is that one of the most prized royal virgins has been raped by her own brother, summarily discarded and publicly humiliated. Tamar has now become a woman with no chance of marrying or having children. As Anderson argues, Tamar is described as mourning as though she is a widow.[29]

A further point to be made is that Amnon makes his crime a public affair by sending Tamar from his house. This reminds the reader of Yahweh's claim that although David sinned in secret, Yahweh would make David's punishment clearly visible to all (12:12). So, there is an implied connection between Amnon's publicly known sins and David's sins and subsequent punishment.

4.1.9 *2 Samuel 13:20*

At the lower level of 13:20 Absalom asks Tamar if Amnon has been with her, and Absalom encourages Tamar to be silent about the rape. Tamar remains a desolate woman in Absalom's house. At the upper level of the narrative Absalom is expressing his outrage. He is asking a rhetorical question. The opposition in the narrative concerns the difference between what is said and what is meant in Absalom's rhetorical question. What Absalom says is, "Has Amnon your

29 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 175.

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brother been with you?" However, this is not in essence a request for information. Rather Absalom is expressing his outrage, albeit implicitly.

The grade of verbal irony is overt as it is immediately apparent that Absalom is not asking Tamar a straightforward question. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the primary sub-category of impersonal irony, as mentioned, is the rhetorical question. The rhetorical question is in 13:20a when Absalom asks Tamar,

האמינון אחיך היה עמך

(Has Amnon your brother been with you?)[30]

The reader knows that this is a rhetorical question, as Absalom does not wait for Tamar's affirmation before giving her advice. Furthermore, the use of a rhetorical question and the allusions to Amnon as her brother (Amnon is spoken of as Tamar's brother two times (13:20)), highlight two possible criticisms of Amnon, which have been discussed throughout this chapter. The first possible criticism is the transgression of incest, and the second is the harm done by Amnon to the family order -a most egregious crime. (It may also be the case that both of these criticisms are being alluded to). Whichever of these criticisms of Amnon is being made, he is the object of ironic attack.[31]

4.1.10 *2 Samuel 13:21–22*

Irony is not readily apparent in this passage. However, a commentary is needed to inform the discussion of irony detected in future passages. In 13:21 David is portrayed as being very angry when he hears what has happened. In 13:22 the narrator informs us that Absalom hates Amnon for raping Tamar. At first sight these responses appear to be appropriate. However, neither of these responses is truly appropriate. In the case of David, his angry response to the rape is appropriate. However, it is not appropriate that this is his sole response to the rape. Importantly, David does not punish Amnon for his crime. Given that David is the King of Israel, it is his responsibility to administer the law including in relation to the transgressions of Amnon.

30 Author's translation.

31 Another possible interpretation of the irony in this passage has an insinuation as the subcategory. The insinuation is found in 13:20b when Absalom cautions Tamar to be silent for the time being. This sentence alludes to further action; the insinuation suggests that something bad will happen. The ironist implies that Absalom will be the next royal member to act unlawfully.

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In the case of Absalom, his hatred of Amnon is unlawful. In Leviticus 19:17 it states, לא־תשנא את־אחיך בלבבך.[32] Therefore, in hating Amnon Absalom is failing to comply with the law. Of note, there is some dispute concerning whether or not the laws of Leviticus were operative in the time of David. This is not problematic for the interpretation of irony in this passage. We can assume that if the law was not operative at the time that it was later created from a social custom that was in force at the time. For instance, we know that Absalom knows that he should not hate his brother in his heart because of his comment to Tamar in 13:20 ie. "He is your brother; do not take this to heart." Furthermore, it may be the case that the SN was written much later than the events it describes occurred. In this case, the laws of Leviticus would have been in force, and certainly applicable in a retrospective telling of events.

Both the King of Israel and the Prince of Israel act contrary to their responsibilities. For instance, David does not administer the law as he should, and Absalom does not follow the law, as he should. David's response to the crime is too weak, as he does not punish Amnon. On the other hand, Absalom's response is too strong as he has hatred for his brother (even if we may understand this reaction). Both responses are contrary to the law, the function of which is to preserve social order. Ideally Amnon should be appropriately punished and, as a consequence, Absalom's hatred would be unwarranted. As a result, social order would be preserved.

An important point to be stressed here is that not only are the laws being flouted, but a situation has been created in which it is extremely difficult to comply with all the relevant laws, even if they wanted to. This poses a particularly grave threat to social order. Let me explain. The difficulty for David in terms of Amnon's punishment, is that in the circumstances the relevant laws are in conflict. For example, as mentioned previously, the punishment for rape according to Deuteronomy 22:28–29 is that the rapist must marry the victim and never divorce the victim. However, this law cannot be enforced in the case of Amnon and Tamar as they are siblings. Moreover, if David were to administer the punishment for incest, Amnon and Tamar would both be exiled (Lev. 18:29) which would be extremely unfair to Tamar. However, in order to preserve social order David must do something to punish Amnon. In not doing anything David has allowed hatred to remain in Absalom's heart. This is significant since, as we have seen, Absalom's hatred for his brother is contrary to the laws.

32 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart …" Translation care of RSV.

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4.1.11 *2 Samuel 13:23–26a*

At the lower level of 13:23–24 Absalom invites the king and his sons to a sheep-shearing festival. In 13:25 David tells Absalom that the king and his servants would be burdensome to Absalom. In 13:26 Absalom asks if Amnon can go to the sheep-shearing festival alone. At the upper level there is an insinuation that Absalom is about to harm, indeed, kill Amnon, particularly in the context of our background knowledge that Absalom hates Amnon. The opposition in the narrative concerns the difference between what is explicitly presented in the text and what is implied. Moreover, it is implied that Absalom believes he is acting righteously by exacting revenge for Amnon's rape of Tamar. Here there is the irony of Absalom being about to commit an even greater crime, namely murder, to revenge Tamar's rape. Absalom is the object of these ironic attacks.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent, and is conveyed by the language in the context of our knowledge of the background information provided in the text. As far as the language is concerned, it is possible to separate this passage into two sections which fit the pattern of irony which was described in reference to 11:1. If so the two sections could be marked as 13:23–25 (verbose section) and 13:26a (concise section). In this case,

אתנו אמנון אחי ילך־נא (13:26a)

(… please let my brother go with us.)[33]

emphasizes Absalom's intention to get Amnon to the festival and, thereby, render him vulnerable. This in turn generates the insinuation that Absalom is going to harm Amnon.

As far as the background information is concerned, it may be suggested that the mention of the sheep-shearing festival in 13:23–24 alludes to the story of Nabal (1 Sam. 25:4). This connection has run throughout the narrative (2 Sam. 12:1–6; 13:12–14), and when it appears, it signifies wrongdoing, in particular, the breach of hospitality customs. Thereby, it would be consistent if this motif continued to signify wrongdoing in the case of Absalom. To be more precise, the allusion to Nabal would appear to indicate a violation of hospitality customs. For instance, Nabal did not offer hospitality to David when he should have (1 Sam. 25:5–11), David provided Uriah with hospitality, but for his own manipulative purposes (2 Sam. 11:6–14)), Amnon requested Tamar's hospitality in order to take advantage of her (2 Sam. 13:8–15), and similarly, it would seem that Absalom was offering tainted hospitality. Given the remark in 13:22

33 Translation care of NRS.

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that Absalom hated Amnon, it would seem unlikely that Absalom would want to celebrate with Amnon. Thereby, the irony in this passage is an insinuation, since the reader assumes that Absalom is going to harm Amnon on the back of Absalom's invitation to Amnon.

However, the claim that Absalom wished Amnon to attend the festival alone is not without debate. Scholars have suggested that Absalom's motive for inviting the king and his sons to the festivities was to stage a challenge to the throne. The evidence for this proposition is as follows: David is spoken of excessively as the 'king' (13:23–24), which may indicate that this interaction with David was political rather than family oriented. Moreover, past stories of rape in the Hebrew Bible indicate that there is a strong connection between rape and escalating political tension (Gen. 34, Judg. 19).[34] Yet, it is also possible that Absalom did not expect the king to go to the celebration, but rather created a devious plan to ensure that Amnon (as the crown prince), would go in place of David.[35] This proposition (which is consistent with what is argued in this section) indicates that the focus of Absalom's attention was to have Amnon come to the festivities alone. This insinuation builds on the insinuation in 13:20, when Absalom tells Tamar to be quiet for the time being. Thereby, the narrator at the upper level of the narrative hints that Absalom is being deceptive, and using hospitality under false pretences, not unlike David (2 Sam. 11:13). This view of the matter is confirmed in 13:32 when Jonadab says to David that Amnon was killed because he raped Tamar.

4.1.12 *2 Samuel 13:26b–27*

In discussing 13:26b, it is necessary to re-iterate that the impersonal ironist is not a character in the narrative, but rather the author or the narrator. However, the ironist's criticism and persona are manifest in the speech and actions of the characters, regardless of the moral standing of these characters. Thereby, in 13:26b the ironic criticism is contained in the rhetorical question that David asks Absalom, namely, why should Amnon go with Absalom. Yet, this does not mean, as Ridout suggests, that the rhetorical question implies that David knows what Absalom's intention is.[36] There are two levels in the text. The lower level of the narrative is the situation as it is explicitly presented. From the perspective of the character of David, the question is a straightforward question. This is later confirmed by the narrative which strongly implies that David was

34 Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 150–151.

35 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 250.

36 Ridout, "Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2)," 147.

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not aware of Absalom's intentions (13:36). (Making David the unknowing victim of irony in this instance). However, the ironist's persona is also evident in David's question and is, thereby, critical of Absalom. This penetrating question points back to the insinuation in the previous sections. The rhetorical question,למה ילך עמך[37] asked in this context and with reference to the impersonal ironist is an indicting remark, since it is not a request for information, but rather a challenge to Absalom's intentions. The answer to the question, given the insinuation in the previous section, must be that Absalom wishes to harm Amnon. The ironist is then critical of Absalom's intentions which are driven by hatred (13:22) and not by good judgement, or חסד.

4.1.13 *2 Samuel 13:28*

At the lower level of 13:28 Absalom tells his servants to kill Amnon when Amnon is drunk and when Absalom gives the command to kill him. Absalom also asks the rhetorical question, "Have I not commanded you?" At the upper level Absalom's rhetorical question, taken in conjunction with his admonition to the soldiers to be valiant, is used in order to reassure the soldiers who are to kill Amnon that Absalom is taking responsibility for the killing and that the killing is righteous. On the basis of background knowledge, we know that the killing is unlawful and, therefore, not righteous. Absalom in effect makes a confident declaration that the killing is righteous because he says so. However, ironically, this confident declaration is false and, therefore, Absalom is far from being the kind of person whose commands are necessarily righteous. So, he is the object of his own ironic attack and he indicts himself in asking the rhetorical question,

אל־תיראו הלוא כי אנכי צויתי

(… fear not; have I not commanded you?)[38]

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent and is dependent upon certain background knowledge of the text. Moreover, the irony is the irony of self-betrayal and Absalom is a victim of the irony since he almost certainly is unaware of it because of his hubris.

In 13:28 Absalom's manipulation of Amnon is in some ways reminiscent of David's attempt to make Uriah pliable with alcohol and festive fare (11:13).

37 "Why should he go with you?"

38 Author's translation.

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However, there is a marked difference in the moral characters of Uriah and Amnon. As far as the narrative is concerned, Uriah would appear to be beyond criticism, whereas Amnon is guilty of raping Tamar. Yet, despite the differences in their moral characters, they share something in common, namely, Uriah and Amnon are both killed unlawfully.

Yet, is it fair to suggest that Amnon's murder was an unlawful killing? Because there is no law governing restitution in cases of rape by a sibling, the proper recompense for Tamar's rape is unknown. It can be assumed that David's decision not to punish Amnon and, thereby, provide justice for Tamar, leaves Absalom hungry for blood vengeance. However, Absalom's decision to take blood vengeance is unlawful as the law in Leviticus 19:18 states that vengeance should not be taken against the בני עמך.[39] Moreover, acts of blood vengeance were thought to have ceased when the monarchy became responsible for administering justice.[40] However, since David did not administer justice as he should have, the question arises as to whether or not it was then rightful for Absalom to seek blood vengeance. A discussion of Amnon's offence is necessary to try to adjudicate this matter. If Amnon's act is just considered as an act of rape, then it is a relatively minor offense (Deut. 22:28–29), and in having Amnon executed, Absalom would be in the wrong.[41] If Amnon's act is taken to be the more serious offence of incest then the punishment is that both participants in the act i.e. Amnon and Tamar, be exiled (Lev. 18:29). Therefore, Absalom is not legally permitted to take Amnon's life, and the implied criticism in this passage is that Absalom has broken the laws which relate to unlawful killing (Exod. 20:13, Deut. 5:17).

As we saw above, the rhetorical question, הלוא כי אנכי צויתי אתכם (13:28b) is the indicting question. Absalom is now responsible for an illegal execution, much in the same way that David was responsible for killing Uriah by commanding others to kill him (11:15). The connection with Uriah, taken together with the allusion to Nabal in 13:23, now point to Nathan's Parable. As we have seen, the rich man in Nathan's Parable is analogous to Nabal and to David (2 Sam. 12:1–7). The following passage (12:8–14) explicitly describes God's adverse assessment and punishment of David's actions in the narrative. Being explicit, the criticism anchors the implied criticism of David. However,

39 "sons of your own people". Author's translation.

40 Henry McKeating, "Vengeance is Mine: A Study of the Pursuit of Vengeance in the Old Testament," *The Expository Times* 74 (1963), 239–245, 241.

41 It is possible that the rape of a royal virgin warranted a heavier penalty but this is unknown.

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this explicit criticism taken in conjunction with the parallels drawn between David, on the one hand, and on the other, Amnon and Absalom (via Nathan's Parable etc.), also add weight to the implied criticism of Amnon and Absalom. In summary, there are multiple parallels between David, on the one hand, and on the other, Amnon and Absalom, from which conclusions can be drawn with respect to the interpretation of the text. Specifically, the text implies that not only David, but also Amnon and Absalom, have broken God's laws and, as a consequence, will suffer God's adverse judgement and be punished. David is analogous to the rich man in Nathan's Parable, who offered hospitality without חסד (2 Sam. 12:7). David is also judged for taking Bathsheba, and having Uriah killed (2 Sam. 9). Amnon, who Tamar cautions will become the נבלה, (2 Sam. 13:13) might also be considered as "the man" in Nathan's Parable as he approaches hospitality without חסד, and he can be judged along with David for taking a woman who belongs to another man. Absalom, is similarly "the man" in Nathan's Parable as he offers hospitality without חסד, and can be judged according to God's judgment because he unjustly orders the execution of another (13:28). Of particular interest, is the knowledge that David has been granted a special concession for his sins. For the judgement of death that he explicitly passes on the rich man in Nathan's parable, and unwittingly on himself (2 Sam. 12:5), is transferred onto the child resulting from his first encounter with Bathsheba (2 Sam 21:14). However, this is not the case with Amnon and Absalom as they have not been granted any special concessions for their sins.

In the light of this implied criticism of the key members of the monarchy, David and his sons, we can infer that the text is pointing to deep-seated corruption in the institution of the monarchy. There is a further point to be made here in relation to verbal irony. The Israelites expected the royal family to uphold God's laws; this is the most important function of the monarchy. As it turns out, ironically, the monarchy far from upholding the law is undermining it. At this juncture it is helpful to outline the laws concerning the installation of a king and the rules which govern the office of a king. Deuteronomy 17:18–20 state:

> When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to face the lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the left or to the right, so that he and his descendants may reign over his kingdom of Israel.

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4.1.14 *2 Samuel 13:29*

13:29 explicitly states quite concisely that Absalom's servants killed Amnon in accordance with Absalom's command. The other major transgressions in the SN thus far, including David laying with Bathsheba (11:4), Uriah's death (11:17b), and the rape of Tamar (13:29), have similarly been reported in clear and concise language. I have made the case that these latter verses are examples of ironic understatement. If so, the understatement serves to trivialise an event which is of great importance, and therefore complies with the traditional view of irony whereby the truth is found in the opposite of what is presented. Hence, if an event is understated, then it is of great importance. The sting of the irony is found in the act of trivialising catastrophic events. 13:29 is also an example of ironic understatement since, as noted, an event of great importance, the killing of Amnon, is reported in unduly concise, indeed curt, terms.

The understated catastrophic events in all these verses are not only devastating for the individuals involved, they also question the integrity of the House of David. Of the greatest importance in these transgressions is the disregard which David, Amnon, and Absalom all show to the laws, especially in regard to the expectation that the Israelites had of the monarchy as they are outlined in Deuteronomy 17:14–20. Therefore, the object of ironic attack is the corrupt monarchy.

4.1.15 *2 Samuel 13:30–33*

At the lower level of 13:30 David hears a report that all of his sons are dead. In 13:31 David and his servants tear their robes. In 13:32–33 Jonadab tells David that only Amnon is dead, and that his murder was conceived because Amnon raped Tamar. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies by the use of unusual language and innuendo that David is a fool for thinking that all his sons are dead rather than merely thinking Amnon is dead. He would have inferred the latter if he had understood the hatred that Absalom had for Amnon but David was oblivious to this. The opposition in the narrative is between Jonadab's perceptiveness and David's lack thereof. Ironically, although David as the king is meant to be wise, and as a father ought to understand his own sons, David is the unknowing fool.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent, and is implied in the language and background knowledge. 13:30–33b comprises two instances of the pattern of verbose language followed immediately by concise, indeed curt, language. The first instance is 13:30–32a. In 13:30–32a*a* the verbosity is a detailed description of the report that all of David's sons have been killed etc.; the curt remark is,[42] כי־אמנון לבדו מת (13:32a*b*). 13:32a*b* emphasizes

42 "… for Amnon alone is dead." Author's translation.

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Absalom's act of unlawful killing, and the reason for Absalom's murderous act, which is Amnon's unlawful sexual transgression. The second instance is 13:32b–33b. The verbosity consists in Jonadab's description of Absalom's motives etc. The curt remark is once again, "Amnon alone is dead". This pattern of verbose and curt language is the same as, can be found in 11:1 et al.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category is innuendo. The innuendo is that David is a fool for not realising that Amnon alone is dead. The knowledge that Amnon alone is dead can be assumed to be important as it is repeated. In the second verbose section Jonadab explains to David that Absalom had been planning to kill Amnon since the time of Tamar's rape. This observation contrasts Jonadab's wisdom with David's foolishness, strengthening the idea that David is the object of ironic attack. Moreover, as Jonadab is חכם it may be assumed that his observations are trustworthy, which seems to discount the theory that Absalom sought to kill Amnon in order to take the throne, as has been suggested.[43] Instead, the knowledge of the motives of Absalom's execution of Amnon highlight the ironist's criticisms throughout the narrative that David does not administer justice effectively. It is reasonable to assume that Absalom executed Amnon because of the hatred he felt for him after the rape of Tamar (13:22), and that David could have calmed Absalom's hatred, if he had punished Amnon. If David followed the punishment for incest in Leviticus 18:29 Amnon would have been expelled from the community and it is reasonable to assume that Amnon would still be alive, and Absalom would not be responsible for the unlawful killing of Amnon. Having said this, there is no fair solution in the law for Tamar's position for she would also have been exiled according to Leviticus 18:29. Notwithstanding the unfairness of exiling Tamar, the outcome of exile for both Amnon and Tamar seems preferable

43 Andrew Hill suggests that Absalom intended to kill Amnon so that he would be the next in line to the throne, and that Jonadab assisted him with this conspiracy. "A Jonadab Connection in the Absalom Conspiracy?" *JETS* 30, no. 4 (1987), 387–390. There is merit to this argument given that Absalom does challenge David's Kingship later on in the story. However, this interpretation requires a retrospective analysis of the text, and may miss the incidents which build to create the desire in Absalom to attempt to take the throne. Gunn suggests that Absalom killed Amnon in order to progress in line to the throne. Gunn argues that Absalom's ambition is the theme of the narrative as the focus of the stories concern kingship and succession, and thereby, it might be deduced that Absalom's intention is to secure the throne. *Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible*, 151. On the other hand, McKane suggests that although there is a focus on succession in the narrative, there is no indication in the text that Absalom killed Amnon in order to become first in line to the throne. McKane rather, points out that the focus of the narrative is that David did not punish Amnon (McKane, *I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary*, 242–243). Trible suggests that Absalom's motive for killing Amnon was to avenge the rape of Tamar. Absalom's intentions might then be discerned in the naming, and the sole mention of, Absalom's daughter, Tamar (Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 55).

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to the actual course of events involving, as it did, Absalom's killing of Amnon and, thus keeping evil in Israel. It may also be argued that Tamar may have been able to remain in Jerusalem. It might also be argued that Tamar herself is not without moral taint since, as we saw above, she did recommend an unlawful course of action to Amnon, namely, that they should get the king to marry them. This interpretation is consistent with the overriding criticism in the narrative of *all* of the members of the royal household.

4.1.16 *2 Samuel 13:34–36*

13:34–36 do not readily show signs of irony, however, they do resolve some controversies in the previous commentary. The passage opens with the comment that Absalom had fled (13:34). 13:35 confirms Jonadab's prediction in 13:33, that it was, indeed, only Amnon who was killed. These verses confirm the view that the execution of Amnon was not lawful and that his intention at this point was not to secure the throne but rather to avenge Tamar's rape.

Notwithstanding the above, it may be argued that there is some irony. For there is an element of overstatement in this section. In 13:34 it is stated that the young boy noticed the arrival of a group of people, 13:35 states that it is the king's sons, minus Amnon, who have returned and in 13:36 the king's sons arrive. This overstatement not only highlights Amnon's death, but also Jonadab's wisdom, and in contrast, David's foolishness. David is, thereby, the object of ironic attack since he was previously tricked by Absalom into letting Amnon go to the sheep-shearing festival (13:24–27), and only now is aware of the consequences of this because Jonadab makes him aware (13:35). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist's ongoing pejorative criticism of David now has even greater weight.

4.1.17 *2 Samuel 13:37–39*

These verses have a transitional role. 13:37 and 13:38 repeat the fact that Absalom fled. (This was also mentioned in 13:34.) It can therefore be assumed that this piece of information is significant. The significance may relate to the punishment for unlawful murder, ie. that Absalom did not want to be put to death. For instance, Leviticus 24:17 calls for the murderer to be put to death. In this narrative it is also apparently, albeit ambiguously, reported that the hostility between David and Absalom abated after David had mourned the death of Amnon (13:39). I return to this controversy in the next chapter.

4.1.18 *Summary of 2 Samuel 13:1–39*

In the opening verses of this chapter (13:1–2), there is an insinuation that Amnon will act as David had done and commit a sexual transgression. 13:3–4 is an amplification of the verbal irony in the previous section; as such, it serves

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to emphasize Amnon's sexual desire for his sister. This irony concerns the laws which prohibit incest. The ironist's implied pejorative criticism of Amnon rests in part on allusions to David's untoward actions. Specifically, parallels are drawn between Amnon's intentions and David's actions in chapters 11 and 12. This connection between the criticism of David, and the criticism of Amnon is exploited further in 13:5–7 where David is tricked by Amnon into sending Tamar to offer hospitality to him. The sub-category of verbal irony in this section is pretended defence of the victim. In 13:8–9 there is an insinuation that Amnon is going to rape Tamar. In 13:10–11 Amnon refuses Tamar's offer of hospitality (the irony in this section is understatement) and in 13:12–13 he rapes her. At this point in the narrative Tamar is an object of ironic attack for recommending an unlawful solution to her predicament. The sub-category of verbal irony is pretended defence of the victim. Of greater importance is the implied pejorative criticism of Amnon. Amnon is shown to be the object of ironic attack and he is called the נבלה. This strong reference to Nabal and Nathan's Parable, shows the strength of the ironist's criticism, which is conveyed in Nathan's Parable, in reference to David. The criticism in this section is brought out by the use of a rhetorical question and pretended ignorance (13:13). The rape of Tamar in 13:14 is spoken of succinctly, and might otherwise, be described as ironic understatement. 13:15–16 involves an amplification of the verbal irony in the previous section, and an ironic misrepresentation—since Amnon does not 'love' Tamar.

In 13:17–19 Amnon is pejoratively and implicitly criticised because he raped a royal virgin. The verbal irony in this section is overstatement. Moreover, the public display of Amnon's sins alludes to God's judgement upon David (2 Sam. 12:12). In 13:20 Amnon is criticised further by way of a rhetorical question. 13:21–22 put forth two criticisms, the first criticism is that David did not punish Amnon, the second criticism is that Absalom is guilty of hating his brother. 13:23–26a insinuate that Absalom is about to commit murder. 13:26b–27 build on the insinuation in the previous section by way of a rhetorical question which challenges Absalom's intentions. In 13:28 Absalom acts not unlike David, and uses hospitality as a means of obtaining an illicit end. This criticism emerges by way of a rhetorical question.

13:29 emphasizes the unlawful killing of Amnon by way of understated language. In 13:30–33 the verbal irony is an innuendo that David is a fool since he did not realise that Absalom had hatred in his heart for Amnon. 13:34–36 presents an overstatement which similarly presents David as a fool. There is no discernible irony in 13:37–39.

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CHAPTER 5

The Deception of the Wise Woman of Tekoa

5.1 2 Samuel 14:1–33

5.1.1 *2 Samuel 14:1–3*

At the lower level of 14:1 Joab is apparently aware that David is thinking of Absalom. (I return to the precise interpretation of this claim below). In 14:2 Joab sends for a wise woman of Tekoa and commands her to pretend that she is a mourner, and in 14:3 Joab tells the woman what to say to David. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist insinuates that David is about to be fooled once again. David has already been deceived by Amnon (2 Sam. 13:1–7) and Absalom (2 Sam. 13:24–27). In both of these instances, ironically, David, the supposedly wise king, was easily fooled by a subordinate. Moreover, he was spoken of in a ridiculing manner because he was fooled easily. Further, David was the unknowing victim of the irony. Now there is a further contrast. This time the contrast is between David and Joab. For Joab is about to fool David. This contrast is emphasised by the use of incongruous language, especially in the context of our background knowledge that David has been fooled by Amnon etc. The incongruous language is particularly notable in the pattern of verbose language immediately followed by curt language. The verbose language in 14:1–3a (the detail of the ruse) is followed by the curt statement in 14:3b that Joab put the words into the woman's mouth. This incongruity emphasizes Joab's action or, to be more specific, that David was about to be tricked by his subordinate, Joab, the general of his army.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is implied by means of the language used and our background knowledge. Indeed, some of this background knowledge is actually alluded to in 14:1–3. Notably, the narrative in 14:1–3 alludes to the narrative in 13:3–5. In 13:3–5 Jonadab and Amnon conspire to trick David. Thus, in 14:1 Joab perceives that the king is thinking of Absalom: כי־לב המלך על־אבשלום.[1] This alludes to 13:4 where Jonadab notices that something is troubling Amnon.

1 "Now Joab the son of Zeruial perceived that the king was thinking of Absalom". Author's translation.

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In 14:2 we are introduced to the אשה חכם[2] from Tekoa who will pretend to be a mourner. This alludes to 13:3 in which Jonadab is described as being a איש חכם[3] who persuades Amnon to pretend to be sick (13:3–5).

The parallels that I have just drawn between 14:1–3 and 13:3–5 may suggest that the correct interpretation of על (14:1) is that David was thinking *of* Absalom. Other scholars have argued that the preposition על, in this context, means that David longed *for* Absalom,[4] that David's thoughts were *against* Absalom,[5] or that David was thinking *of* Absalom.[6] At this stage in the narrative there is not enough background knowledge to provide a definitive interpretation of David's intentions. However, as argued, the episode in 14:1–3 parallels events in 13:3–5. These parallels support McCarter's suggestion that the preposition על indicates that the king was thinking *of* Absalom; thereby, creating an opening in the narrative for Joab to put forth his plan to ensure that David permits Absalom to return to Jerusalem.[7] This mirrors 13:4 in particular, where Jonadab is aware *of* Amnon appearing to be troubled thereby creating an opening for Jonadab to put forth his plan to Amnon.

In summation, 14:1–3 alludes to 13:3–5 and, thereby, adds weight to the ironist's implied pejorative criticism of David, namely, that he is foolish because he is easily deceived. The sub-category of impersonal irony, in this instance, is insinuation.

5.1.2 *2 Samuel 14:4–7*

The narrative in 14:4–7 is not an instance of irony by analogy as is found in Nathan's Parable[8] (2 Sam. 12:1–6) but instead involves a deception, not unlike

2 "Wise woman".

3 "Wise man".

4 Jacob Hoftijzer, "David and the Tekoite woman," *VT* 20, no. 4 (1970), 419–444, 419.

5 Anderson argues that it is most likely that David was hostile towards Absalom, not only for the presence of על but also because it was necessary for Joab to persuade David to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem. (Anderson, *WBC, Vol. n. 2 Samuel*, 187). Fokkelman argues that it is improbable to assume that David longed for Absalom given the length of time that David refused to see Absalom (14:24, 28), and in the manner in which David accepts the oath (14:21), but then bans Absalom from his presence (14:24). The whole ruse might also seem unnecessary if David truly longed for Absalom. Instead, Fokkelman suggests that this sentence would be better read that David longed to march out against Absalom, as David mourned for Amnon (Fokkelman, "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 126–127).

6 McCarter suggests that this sentence does not indicate the nature of David's thoughts, but rather the idea that David was thinking of Absalom, which meant that it was an opportune time for Joab to enact his plan. (McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 344).

7 Ibid.

8 Hugh Pyper's suggestion that this story is a parody of Nathan's Parable must be investigated further. Parody is ordinarily employed to ridicule an original document (Muecke, *The*

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the cases which are spoken of in 2 Samuel 13:1–7 and 24–27. Similarly, in 14:4–7, David is tricked into making a poor decision, is the object of ironic attack and is the unknowing victim of the irony. The ironist's device in this case is the pretended defence of the victim, as it was in 2 Samuel 13:1–7; 24–27. Of particular note, is the similarity of this episode where David is tricked by the 'wise woman of Tekoa,' with 13:3 where David is tricked, in essence, by Amnon's 'wise' friend Jonadab. The contrast here is between the cunning of the wise woman of Tekoa and the foolishness of David. This contrast sets up the ironic content for the pretended defence of the victim. Thus, the ironist pretends to be defending David against the crafty woman of Tekoa. However, David is actually the object of ironic attack since a reasonable person would have seen through the 'wise' woman's ruse.

At the lower level of 14:4–7 the wise woman of Tekoa acts out her part in Joab's ruse. In 14:4 she does obeisance to David. David asks her what is troubling her, and she tells him that she is a widow (14:5) and that she had two sons who were playing in the field when one struck the other and killed him (14:6). In 14:7 the woman tells David that the entire family were inflamed by the killing and wanted to kill her son in revenge, even though he was her only remaining son. The woman tells David that this act would leave her husband without an heir.

The situation outlined by the woman is obviously analogous to David's, indeed deliberately so. Therefore, David should have been suspicious. Ironically, however, David—who as king is supposed to be wise—is confidently oblivious to the deception, and, hence, is the unknowing victim of irony. (Note that this is not an instance of irony by analogy since the analogy is merely in the service of the deception).[9] The incongruity in the narrative is the fact that the King

Compass of Irony 78). In the usual use of parody the story of the woman of Tekoa would be used to poke fun of Nathan's Parable. This is inconsistent with the narrative, given that Nathan's Parable highlights the criticism of David (2 Sam. 12:7–14). It would, thereby, seem incongruent that the narrative would make fun of God's judgement that David has violated laws by taking Bathsheba and having her husband killed. However, Pyper argues that a parody of Nathan's Parable draws the reader's attention to the message in the original document (Pyper, "The Enticement to Re-read Repetition as Parody in 2 Samuel," *BiblInt* 1, no. 2 (1993), 153–165, 161). This argument is consistent with the narrative, however, it is not the common use of parody. Pyper argues that the parodying features in the opening verses of chapter 14 are as follows; the substitution of Joab for God (14:1), the substitution of a woman for a prophet (14:2), and the account of a woman as חכם (given the historical context) (14:2) (Pyper, "The Enticement to Re-Read Repetition as Parody in 2 Samuel," 157). These features are also common to the sub-category of pretended defence of the victim.

9 Note in irony by analogy, the analogous story is used to criticize the original story. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 70–71.

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of Israel is foolish and the lowly woman of Tekoa wise. The grade of irony is covert, as the irony is not immediately apparent, and is only apprehended with knowledge of the background story of David and his sons.

In the story of the woman of Tekoa, David would seem to be analogous to the woman of Tekoa, and the sons who fought in the field appear to be analogous to Absalom and Amnon. Yet, there are some striking differences between the story of the woman of Tekoa and David's own situation. These differences ultimately obstruct a correct judgment by David in respect of Absalom's punishment notwithstanding that a correct judgment by David in this matter appears to be both the woman's and Joab's goal.

In this respect the woman of Tekoa's story contrasts with Nathan's Parable. In Nathan's Parable, you will recall, a parallel is drawn between the rich man's mistreatment of the poor man and David's mistreatment of Uriah. Of course, as discussed, there are differences between the story of the rich man and the story of David and Bathsheba. For instance, in the story of the rich man there is a traveller whereas there is no traveller in the story of David and Bathsheba. However, as we saw in the discussion in 2 Samuel 12:1–6, these differences do not obstruct David in making a correct judgement in respect of his sin of 'stealing' someone else's wife (Bathsheba) as a result of seeing the analogy between his 'theft' of Bathsheba and the rich man's theft of the lamb from the poor man. By contrast, there are important differences between the woman of Tekoa's story and David's circumstances vis-à-vis Absalom such that these differences are likely to obstruct David in making a correct judgment in respect of Absalom's punishment.

In the story of the woman of Tekoa, the woman of Tekoa only had two sons (14:7), whereas David had many sons. This is significant, as the woman of Tekoa would, potentially, lose the sole heir to her husband's inheritance (14:7). This would not be the case for David. Moreover, the woman was a widow (14:6), whereas David was not. This is particularly pertinent given that an אלמנה was a woman who did not have a male within a broader kin-group to look after her. This meant that an אלמנה was one of the most vulnerable people of the community.[10] David was the most powerful man in Israel. Given these differences between the story of the woman of Tekoa and David's situation the judgement to be made in the case of her son is quite different from the judgment to be made in the case of Absalom. In other words, the analogy being drawn between the woman of Tekoa's story and David's situation is likely to obstruct David's correct judgement in respect of Absalom.

10 John Rook, "When is a Widow Not a Widow? Guardianship Provides an Answer," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture*, 28, no. 1 (1998), 4–6, 5.

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Therefore, the story of the woman of Tekoa should not be considered to be analogous to Nathan's Parable. Rather the story of the woman of Tekoa should be regarded as analogous to other instances of deception in the narrative, such as Jonadab and Amnon's deception of David, and Absalom's deception of David.

Other significant differences between Nathan's Parable and the story of the woman of Tekoa include the following. In Nathan's Parable, God was known to be the architect of the Parable. In the case of the story of the woman of Tekoa, Joab was the author of the story and the story was a complete fabrication intended to deceive David. In Nathan's Parable the agent who delivers the Parable is a prophet, whereas, in the story of the woman of Tekoa, the agent is an actress. Furthermore, the episode in Nathan's Parable can be considered irony by analogy as it seeks to criticize the analogous situation (David's situation vis-a-via Bathsheba), and to bring David to an awareness of his unlawful actions in respect of Bathsheba through a process of self-judgement. In the story of the woman of Tekoa, as in the case of the other deceptions mentioned, the deceivers (Joab and the woman of Tekoa) use deception to manipulate the king in the service of ends other than his making correct judgments.

Further, the other episodes of deception have had disastrous outcomes. For instance, Amnon's deception leads to a rape and ultimately ends in his own death. Absalom's deception leads to the murder of his brother and, ultimately, exile for him. In the next section, I argue that the desired outcome of Joab's ruse (Absalom's return to Jerusalem) is unlawful and potentially disastrous.

Notwithstanding what I have argued thus far, the ruse of the woman of Tekoa does resemble the story of Nathan's Parable in one significant yet less obvious respect (leaving aside the obvious similarities), that being, it alludes to a previous story. In Nathan's Parable the story of David and Nabal (1 Sam. 25) is alluded to (and utilised) and in the story of the woman of Tekoa, the story of Cain and Abel is alluded to. However, in the case of Nathan's Parable, the analogy to David and Nabal is (as we have seen) helpful, whereas, in the story of the woman of Tekoa, the analogy to the story of Cain and Abel is unhelpful. For the story of Cain and Abel involves a reduced punishment for Cain whereas the woman of Tekoa is requesting no punishment for her son and, likewise, Joab and the woman of Tekoa are seeking to cause David to permit Absalom to go without any punishment.

I now argue that it would have been inconsistent both with God's law and with the rules of blood vengeance for David not to punish Absalom for killing Amnon. To facilitate the argument, I provide a comparison between the story of the woman of Tekoa, David's situation vis-à-vis Absalom, and the story of Cain and Abel. The story of Cain and Abel is relevant because it functions as

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a quasi-legal precedent in a context in which the application of God's law and the rules of blood vengeance are otherwise unclear. In 14:6 the woman of Tekoa tells David that she had two sons and one of the sons killed the other son in a שׂדה. In the story of Absalom and Amnon, Absalom orders Amnon's execution (13:28). In the story of the brothers Cain and Abel, Cain lured Abel out into a שׂדה and killed him (Gen 4:8). In 14:7 (in overstated language) the woman tells David that all of the clan have risen up against her, as they wish to kill her son to avenge a murder he has committed. The clan are prepared to kill her son even though he is an heir. This would eliminate the woman's husband's line (14:7).

In 14:7 the wording ונשמידה גם את־היורש (... and we will detroy the heir also) in the women's story suggests that the clan are trying to kill the son in order to take the inheritance,[11] and not necessarily on the basis of their morally motivated judgement. This is not in keeping with the rules of blood vengeance which require an appropriate punishment for a crime (Deut. 19:6). In the example of the ruse, the blood avenger it is not within his rights to kill the woman of Tekoa's son in order to benefit from the inheritance. Similarly, Absalom's hatred was the motivation for Amnon's murder. This is not in keeping with the rules of blood vengeance. These rules limit violence and prohibit retaliation driven by unfettered rage.[12] However, in 14:7 there is no explicit statement that David's clan are planning to kill Absalom in order to take his inheritance. Indeed, Absalom's death may be warranted, even if this means that the clan must kill one of its own, because the preservation of the clan is contingent upon protecting itself from internal threats. So, while there are some similarities between the situation of the woman of Tekoa's son and Absalom there are important differences, including some additional to the ones already mentioned.

The outcome of the story of Cain and Abel is that God punishes Cain (Gen. 4:12) by sending him into exile rather than by killing him. Moreover, God protects Cain by way of the mark of Cain (Gen. 4:15). Notably, Cain is the only remaining son of the original human beings. Hence it is crucial to protect Cain. Likewise, Absalom flees to Geshur (2 Sam. 13:37) and is in exile. Absalom does not have the protection that Cain had but, crucially, he is not the only

11 It is possible that Joab, who created the ruse, believed that Absalom killed Amnon in order to take his inheritance. This is not the case as Absalom killed Amnon out of hatred because Amnon raped Tamar (2 Sam. 13:22, 32). However, as Absalom told Tamar not to mention the rape (2 Sam. 13:20) it is possible that Joab would not know this. The confusion adds to the comedy of events.

12 Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24.

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remaining son of David, let alone of the human race. The situation of the remaining son of the woman of Tekoa is somewhat similar to that of Cain, although obviously his death would be far less significant.

So, in the case of the woman from Tekoa it may be valid to protect her last remaining son; moreover, the intentions of the blood-avenger are corrupt, and the clan would be damaged by killing her son. In the case of Absalom, there are other sons. Moreover, the blood-avenger's motives (assuming that there *is* a blood-avenger who seeks vengeance for Amnon's murder) are correct. Furthermore, Absalom's killing of Amnon was unlawful in that he did not have the support of other family members; rather Absalom had to trick David into allowing Amnon to go to the sheep-shearing festival where he was killed (2 Sam. 13:26–27). Therefore, the clan would be protected from *not* having Absalom in the family, given his propensity to engage in unlawful killing motivated by brooding anger (2 Sam. 13:22). In conclusion, while there are similarities between all three stories, each story is different from the other two in some important respects. Therefore, the story of Cain and Abel cannot be used to determine the appropriate punishment for Absalom. Nor can the woman of Tekoa's story be so used.

5.1.3 *2 Samuel 14:8–11*

At the lower level of 14:8 David tells the woman of Tekoa to go home, and that he will give orders concerning her situation. In 14:9 the woman says to David "On me be the guilt, my lord, the king, and on my father's house; let the king and his house be guiltless" (14: 9). David tells the woman he will protect her (14:10). The woman implores David "to keep the Lord your God in mind" (14:10) so that the blood-redeemer will not kill her son. David assures her that her son will be safe (14:11).[13] At the upper level of the narrative the implication is that David has made an oath to protect her son. Moreover, the ironist implies, by way of analogy (but not irony by analogy), that David will 'take on the guilt' in the case of the decision concerning the fate of Absalom.[14]

13 Note the additional irony in David's statement in 14:11. In this verse David tells the woman of Tekoa that not a hair of her son's head will fall to the ground. This is ironic given that Absalom, David's son, eventually did die by his hair being entangled in a tree so that he literally did not fall to the ground. For this observation I am indebted to David Marcus' comments on my PhD thesis.

14 When the woman of Tekoa says that she will 'take on the guilt' of the decision that David makes in respect of the fate of her son, she is being utterly insincere; after all, the entire episode about an alleged son is a fabrication. On the other hand, the woman of Tekoa actually does desire David to 'Take on the guilt' in relation to Absalom, albeit she does not communicate this desire of hers to David. At any rate, the implication is that the woman of Tekoa believes that the analogy between the story about her son and the situation of

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The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. However, the irony is highlighted by the exaggerated language. This suggests that the mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category is overstatement. For instance, David commands the woman to go to her house while he considers her request in 14:8. Yet, instead of following David's orders, the woman makes a dramatic, overstated declaration that she will take on the guilt of David's decision, so that the royal house will remain guiltless (14:9):

> עלי אדני המלך העון ועל־בית אבי והמלך וכסאו נקי
> (On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father's house; let the king and his throne be guiltless).[15]

This comment is unclear. It may be the case that the woman has given her assurance to David that she will bear the guilt if the king's judgement proves to be in error;[16] it may express the formal language which was used in the court;[17] or it may be an extra plea for forgiveness.[18] However, regardless of the intention of the statement, the remark is overstated. Schulz likens this remark to Abigail's speech to David (1 Sam. 25:31) which he argues is also illogical, gushing, and calculating.[19]

The implications of the overstated language are best considered within the framework of the previous section. If the story of the woman of Tekoa involves an allusion to David, then it is possible that the woman's comment that she will take on the guilt implies that David should take on the guilt of Absalom. Schulz explains this in detail below.

> The woman's offer to assume the bloodguilt of her son is ultimately paradoxical. "Let the sin be upon me, my lord the king, and on my father's house; the king and his throne shall be clear" (14:9) sounds generous, until we consider that in the parable the woman *is* the king. David, in other words, will incur bloodguilt if Absalom is allowed to live. Such a stain according to Gen 9:5–6; Exod 21:12; Lev 24:17; Num 35:16–21, 31; Deut

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Absalom is sufficiently clear that David will ultimately see it and accept that that his adjudication in the case of Absalom ought to be same as in the case of her son.

15 Translation from the RSV.

16 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. II. 2 Samuel*, 188.

17 K. N. Jung, *Court Etiquette in the Old Testament*. Drew University: Ph.D. dissertation, 1979, 42–52.

18 Jacob Hoftijzer, "David and the Tekoite Woman," *VT* 20 (1970), 419–444, 427.

19 Schulz, "Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel," 137–138.

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> 19:11–13, can be dissipated only by blood, not by forgiveness. Again, the message is that David must kill Absalom to eliminate bloodguilt.[20]

According to Schulz's assessment of the analogies, if David takes on the bloodguilt of Absalom then the message is that David should die instead of Absalom. However, as has been mentioned previously, it cannot be certain that the allusion to David is intended; perhaps the speech of the woman of Tekoa is overstated but without this intention (14:9).

In the next step in the narrative David reassures the woman that he will keep her free from any harassment (14:10). It is only in 14:11 when the woman asks David to ensure that the blood avenger does not destroy her son, that David responds with, what Alter calls the "hyperbolic declaration."[21] David's response is not only an overstated declaration, it also signifies a significant development in the narrative. For the mention of Yahweh implies that David spoke an oath in God's name.[22] Thereby, David is tricked into taking on Absalom's bloodguilt by the lowly figure of the woman of Tekoa.[23]

Ironically, David has now solemnly committed himself to protect 'someone' from a non-existent threat in a non-existent situation. Moreover, given the differences between the circumstance of Absalom and that of the woman of Tekoa's son (differences elaborated above), David has been tricked into making an adjudication in the case of Absalom based on an erroneous comparison between Absalom's circumstance and that of the woman of Tekoa's son. Moreover, in doing so he has 'taken on the guilt' of his decision in respect of Absalom with the possible consequence that David himself might need to be killed.

The opposition in the narrative is between what is said and what is meant. The woman says that she will 'take on the guilt' of the decision in the case of her son, however, the implication is that David will take on the guilt of the decision in the case of Absalom. David is the object of ironic attack, and the unknowing victim of irony.

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20 Ibid., 52.

21 Robert Alter, *The David Story*, 277.

22 Hoftijzer, "David and the Tekoite Woman," 428 n.1

23 In addition to the argument that this narrative is a parody, it has also been suggested that this narrative is a 'juridical parable.' The essence of the juridical parable is that it concerns a legal issue and a judge making a self-judgement (Simon, 207–242). The problem with this assessment, as Gunn argues, is that it presupposes the legitimacy of a litigant putting their case to a king or a judge in the dock. (Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*, 41–42).

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5.1.4 *2 Samuel 14:12–14*

At the lower level of 14:12 the woman of Tekoa asks David for permission to speak to him. In 14:13 the woman of Tekoa tells David that in giving his decision with respect to her son he has, in effect, convicted himself if he does not bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. She also asks David, "Why then have you reckoned such a thing against the people of God?"[24] (14:13). This is a rhetorical question. At the lower (explicit) level it is a straightforward question and the assumption is that the woman of Tekoa is waiting for a response from David; instead she continues her argument in the speech. Being a rhetorical question, there is an implication and an opposition between what is said and what is meant. In asking this particular rhetorical question she is, in effect, implying that David does not administer justice impartially. Therefore, David is the object of the ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is overt, as it is immediately apparent.

The woman's reproachful rhetorical question (and expansion thereof) is not unlike the reproachful rhetorical question (and expansions thereof) of Uriah (2 Sam. 11:11). However, in the cases of Uriah, it is clear that he was fighting an injustice and imploring righteous behaviour. In the case of the woman of Tekoa, this conclusion cannot be established. There is a debate regarding whether David should have allowed Absalom to be killed or left in exile.[25] Propp suggests that the very nature of the parable, which associates Absalom with the murderous son of the woman of Tekoa, convincingly indicts Absalom as a murderer.[26] Indeed, Propp argues that the proper course of action to take in regards to Absalom is to kill him and that this course of action is in line with retributive justice.[27]

In terms of the legal texts Genesis 9:5–6; Exodus 21:12; Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:16–21, 31; Deuteronomy 19:11–13 the right course of action is to kill Absalom, as he lay in wait to kill Amnon out of anger (2 Sam. 22–23). However, the woman of Tekoa appears to be asking the king for mercy for Absalom (as well as (explicitly) for her son). This implicit request is made by means of

24 Author's translation.

25 Anderson argues that the woman's parable serves as an *apologia* for David, as the rightful course of action for David would have been to leave Absalom in exile. Thereby, the knowledge that David was tricked into allowing Absalom to leave exile exonerates David of not rightfully following the law. However, the knowledge that David can be easily manipulated does not inspire confidence in the king, therefore, the suggestion that there is irony in this passage is preferable (Anderson, *WBC, Vol. n. 2 Samuel*, 186).

26 Propp, "David and the Tekoite Woman," 50.

27 Ibid., 51.

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an allusion to the story of Cain and Abel,[28] where God is merciful to Cain. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit our commentary on the story of Cain and Abel in order to determine the proper punishment for Absalom.

The outcome of the story of Cain and Abel is that God punishes Cain (Gen. 4:12). However, God also protects Cain (Gen. 4:15). In the case of Absalom, it may be argued that his state in exile is not unlike Cain's situation. Both men should have received the punishment of death, however, instead they are exiled.[29] God's mercy in the story of Cain and Abel consists in a reduction of punishment. The woman of Tekoa requests that David do away completely with any punishment for Absalom. One difficulty with this request is that David is being asked not to punish Absalom, yet Absalom has committed the serious crime of murder. A second difficulty is that David is himself implicated in this crime since it was David's decision not to punish Amnon which caused Absalom to kill Amnon (2 Sam. 13:21–22). A third difficulty is that God did not lift his punishment from David (2 Sam. 12:10–14) when David implored God to let the child from his illegitimate union live (2 Sam. 12:22). Thereby, although God is merciful, God still punishes both David and Cain. Surely David should act as God did.

It may also be suggested that only God had the authority to reduce Cain's punishment and, therefore, only God—and not David—has the authority to reduce Absalom's. In response it might be said that in swearing חי־יהוה David swears an oath to protect the woman's son, and (according to the woman of Tekoa) on pain of inconsistency Absalom also (14:12).[30] However, we have pointed to important differences in the two cases; so arguably David ought not to swear to protect Absalom even if it is reasonable for him to swear to protect the woman of Tekoa's son.

In conclusion, we saw above that David was the object of the woman of Tekoa's ironic attack (by means of her rhetorical question). However, ironically, it is the inadequacies of the woman of Tekoa's analogy and perspective that have now been revealed. Therefore, the ironist (the woman of Tekoa) has herself become the object of irony. Moreover, she is evidently confidently unaware of this. Therefore, she is also the victim of irony.

28 J. Blenkinsopp, "Jonathan's Sacrilege. 1 SM 14, 1–46: A Study in Literary History," *CBQ*, 6 (1964), 423–49, 449.

29 J. L. Jensen's suggestion that Absalom is "less guilty" as he did not kill Amnon with his own hands has merit. "Desire, Rivalry and Collective Violence in the "Succession Narrative,'" *JSOT* 55 (1992), 39–59, 54.

30 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 348.

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5.1.5 *2 Samuel 14:15–17*[31]

At the lower level of 14:15 the woman of Tekoa tells David that she has come to tell David these things, as the people have made her afraid, and because she believes that David will grant her request. At the lower level of 14:16 the woman suggests to David that he protect her and her son from the blood-avenger. In 14:17 the woman tells David that his word will set her at peace, as the king's judgement is like the lord's, and that David's word is like the angel of God, which discerns "good and evil." At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is not a good administrator of justice. The opposition in the narrative concerns the difference between what is said and what is implied. David is the object of ironic attack, and the unknowing victim of the irony.

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is praise in order to blame. This sub-category of irony praises the object of ironic attack for qualities which are known to be lacking.[32]

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31 There is a discussion regarding the ordering of the woman's speech. Most scholars tend to agree with Cook that the true order of this chapter is as follows: 13:38–14:7, 15–17, 8–14, 18–33. In this ordering of events the king gives his orders and the woman responds to those commands (14:8–14) at the completion of the woman's plea ("Notes on the Composition of 2 Samuel," AJSL, XVI (1899–1900), 145–177, 158). On the other hand Ridout (137) argues that the woman of Tekoa reverts back to her plea in verse 14:15 in order to divert David's attention from Joab's role in the drama. The verses in the story of the woman from Tekoa do appear to be presented in a disjointed order, and redaction criticism may alleviate this clumsiness. However, in an ironic interpretation this clumsiness may go towards indicating that the woman of Tekoa is not such a smooth operator. This presentation of the woman of Tekoa is important when we understand the analogy in comparison with Nathan's Parable (12:1–15). The distinction of a prophet speaking God's judgement must be described with distinction from the trickery of a human agent. If this narrative is compared with the story of Jonadab and Amnon, it can be noted that there is a similar pattern of repetition in the outworking of the plan (13:5–6). Similarly, Absalom's plan to invite Amnon to the sheep shearing festival is not without a degree of persuasion (13:23–27). This technique of repetition not only adds suspense to the story, but also emphasizes the strength of the deception. Ridout (137) suggests that the 'wise' advice of Jonadab and the woman of Tekoa ends in unmitigated disaster indicating an irony (Ridout, "Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2)"). Rendsburg argues that "disordered speech and storytelling" is not uncommon in biblical stories and cites the following examples: Gen 37:28, 30; Ruth 2:7, Judg 18:14–20, 1 Sam 9:12–13, 1 Sam 17:38. G. A. Rendsburg, "Confused language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," *JHScr* 2.6 (1999). Online: http:www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/.

32 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 67.

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Praise in order to blame is particularly evident in 14:17 where the woman of Tekoa says, המלך לשמע הטוב והרע.[33] Anderson argues that the terms "good and evil" may be a merismus which refers to all of the law. In this case, the use of the term merismus would suggest that David is an exceptional administrator of justice.[34] Cartledge suggests that this verse should not be interpreted as a merismus, but rather as an indication of the king's sound judgement in legal matters.[35] Either way, the verse must be interpreted as ironic given that the narrative thus far suggests that David is not a good administrator of justice (including God's disapproval (2 Sam. 12:9)). Moreover, the use of flowery language by the woman of Tekoa emphasises the irony and, thereby, serves to heighten the criticism of David. It is a further issue whether or not the woman of Tekoa intends to be ironic rather than merely intending to flatter him. At any rate, what is evident is the presence of an ironist in the form of an authorial persona. Therefore, this is an instance of impersonal irony and the sub-category is praise in order to blame; more specifically, praise for desirable qualities known to be lacking.

The content of the irony is that David is not a good administrator of justice and, of course, David is the object of ironic attack. This has been a common theme of criticism throughout the SN. The irony is heightened by the woman's remark in 14:17 ויהוה אלהיך יהי עמך[36] given that it is spoken at a stage in the narrative when Yahweh has begun to punish David.[37]

5.1.6 *2 Samuel 14:18–20*

At the lower level of 14:18 David asks the woman of Tekoa to be truthful to him, and the woman agrees. In 14:19 David asks the woman if Joab is responsible for the ruse, and the woman replies that Joab is responsible for the ruse and that Joab told the woman what to say. At the lower level of 14:20 the woman tells David that Joab wanted to change the course of events. She also says that David is wise and all knowing. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is, in fact, *not* wise and all knowing. The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what is said and what is known of David, i.e. that he is not wise and all knowing. David is the object of the ironic attack and probably the unknowing victim of the irony.

33 "The king understands good and evil."

34 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 189.

35 Cartledge, *SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel*, 550. Cartledge argues that this verse points to the Israelite theology of Kingship, which imagined the king as semi-divine.

36 "And may the Lord your God be with you." Translation from NKJ.

37 Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History,* 141.

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The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category is praise in order to blame.

In 14:20 this praising in order to blame continues on from 14:17. The woman says,

> ואדני חכם כחכמת מלאך האלהים לדעת את־כל־אשר בארץ
> (… my lord has the wisdom of the Angel of God; he knows everything that happens on earth).[38]

However, the content in 14:20 is different from 14:17, as this verse is not specifically concerned with David's ability (or rather, the lack thereof) to administer justice, but rather with his wisdom and knowledge (or rather, the lack thereof). The content of the irony is that David is not wise and all-knowing. As Hugh Pyper suggests, "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is ironic when she has just succeeded in hoodwinking him into recalling Absalom. Even his apparent astuteness in identifying the hand of Joab in her intervention comes too late to prevent him from swearing the oath that traps him."[39]

5.1.7 *2 Samuel 14:21–23*

At the lower level of 14:21 David allows Absalom to return from exile. In 14:22 Joab prostrates himself in front of David, does obeisance to David, blesses the king, and tells David that he has found favour in the sight of David as his request has been granted. At the lower level of 14:23 Joab goes to Geshur and brings Absalom back to Jerusalem. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that although David has granted Absalom's return, Joab has not found favour with David. The opposition in the narrative can be found in the difference between what Joab explicitly says (that Absalom's return is because Joab has found favour with David) and the implied truth of the situation (that Absalom's return is due to Joab tricking David into swearing an oath).

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent, and the mode of verbal irony is impersonal. The sub-category of verbal irony in these verses is praise in order to blame. However, the previous instances of this sub-category were cases of praise for desirable qualities known to be lacking, whereas this instance of this sub-category is, 'Inappropriate or Irrelevant

38 Translation from NJB.

39 Pyper, "The Enticement to Re-read: Repetition as Parody in 2 Samuel," 159.

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Praise.'[40] The irrelevant praise is expressed in Joab's response to the king in 14:22,

> היום ידע עבדך כ־מצאתי חן בעיניך אדני המלך אשר־עשׂה המלך את־דבר עבדו
> (Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant).[41]

This praise is patently irrelevant as Joab did not gain the king's favour. Instead David was tricked into making an oath, and David had no option but to follow Joab's plan. Therefore, there is no basis whatsoever in the praise. The content of the irony is that David has been tricked into permitting Absalom to return. David is the object of ironic attack since he has been tricked by a subordinate who now makes him look foolish by praising him

5.1.8 *2 Samuel 14:24*

Verse 14:24 is not obviously ironic. Nevertheless, a brief commentary is helpful in relation to instances of irony to be discussed in other verses. In 14:24 David tells Joab to direct Absalom to go to Absalom's house and not to come into the king's presence. Of note, David does not act according to the law by allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem. Similarly, David does not act according to the oath he swore to the woman of Tekoa, as he does not allow Absalom to participate fully in the community. Fokkelman remarks, "David has not executed the spirit of the oath, merely its letter."[42] Yet, in fairness to David, what was he to do? Absalom's return to Jerusalem indicates that there is no guilt in him. David's oath suggests that he has taken on Absalom's guilt unwittingly (14:13), which may indicate that Absalom's position is restored. However, as has been discussed, it is impossible for Absalom to be righteously restored. As I have noted earlier, the deception of Joab and the woman of Tekoa has left David in an invidious position, not unlike the other deceptions in this narrative.

5.1.9 *2 Samuel 14:25–26*

At the lower level of 14:25 Absalom is spoken of as being the most beautiful man in Israel and without any physical blemishes. At the lower level of 14:26 there is a description of Absalom's hair, which is said to grow very heavy on him, requiring it to be cut annually. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist insinuates that Absalom could potentially try to usurp the throne. This

40 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 67.

41 Translation from RSV.

42 Fokkelman,"King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 147.

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insinuation is conveyed in the excessive mention of Absalom's beauty, and in the reference to his plentiful hair.[43] The incongruity in the narrative concerns the difference between what is said and what is meant. Although the ironist stresses Absalom's physical attractiveness, a quality associated with kings, the ironist is really trying to convey that Absalom is a threat to David. Absalom is the object of the ironic attack.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category of impersonal irony in this instance is a combination of an overstatement and an insinuation. The overstatement is evident in the excessive description of Absalom's physical appearance, which begins in 14:25:

וכאבשלום לא־היה אשׁ־יפה בכל־ישׂראל להלל מאד
(In all Israel there was no one more praised for his beauty than Absalom).[44]

This praise of Absalom, although relevant in the context, is clearly overstated, as 14:25 goes on to state that Absalom was without blemish from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. In 14:26 the excessive description of Absalom's physical appearance is extended to include a detailed description of Absalom's hair, which was cut and weighed yearly. The overstatement here concerns the weight of Absalom's hair. It was cut annually and weighed and found to weigh

43 It has been suggested that Absalom's act of shaving his hair indicates that he is a temporary Nazarite. If this is true, it may be the case that Absalom had become a temporary Nazarite in order to quiet his 'distemper' (Josephus *l.c.* http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11395-nazarite), which may point to repentance in Absalom. It may also be the case that Absalom is a Nazarite who has dedicated himself as an offering to God. The act of shaving his head each year would be a renewal of his dedication (Eliezer Diamond, "An Israelite Self-Offering in the Priestly Code: A New Perspective on the Nazarite," *JQR* 88, no. ½ (1997), 1–18, 17–18). It may then be surmised that Absalom took the vow of the Nazarite after ordering the execution of Amnon to do penance. If this is the case then the extreme representation of Absalom's perfection, and the sacrifice of his hair may point to the strength of his remorse. Another consideration is that the emphasis of Absalom's hair points to his pride, which is his sin. This would suggest that Absalom was not holy, but conceited (Gregory Spinner, '"Absalom Glorified in His Hair": On the Midrashic Transvaluation of Nazirites.' https://www.academia.edu/6823188/_Absalom_Gloried_in_His_Hair_On_The_Midrashic_Transvaluation_of_Nazirites). The narrative does not give enough information at this stage for the reader to know if he is remorseful and holy or vain and unholy. However, David Marcus does make the interesting observation that the hair which Absalom is so proud of is ultimately the cause of his undoing.

44 Translation from NJB.

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in the order of four and a half pounds; but one man's hair could not possibly weigh that much.[45]

The overstatement of Absalom's physical appearance suggests that Absalom had gained great favour in Jerusalem. Bar-Efrat even argues that the mention of Absalom's perfection and luxurious hair is an indicator that fate favoured Absalom.[46] Indeed, the overstatement may be implying something more than this, namely, that Absalom had the properties of a king. The idea that Absalom had the properties of a king is strengthened when we compare the explicit physical description of Absalom with the explicit descriptions of David and of Saul. In all cases they are extremely flattering, as befits someone about to be anointed king.

Consider, for example, the following description of David just before he is anointed as Saul's successor in 1 Samuel 16:12:

> והוא אדמוני עם־יפה עינים וטוב ראי
>
> (Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome).[47]

This description is also comparable to the description of Saul in the story leading up to Saul's anointing (1 Sam. 9:2):

> ולו־היה בן ושמו שאול בחור וטוב ואין איש מבני ישראל טוב ממנו משכמו ומעלה גבה מכל־העם
>
> (And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; from his shoulders upwards he was taller than any of the people).[48]

We can conclude from this that those who were about to be anointed as kings were portrayed as being exceptionally physically attractive. Therefore, the overstatement of Absalom's physical attractiveness not only has the implication that he may be next in line to be the anointed king, but also potentially generates the insinuation that Absalom was seeking to take the throne from David.

5.1.10 *2 Samuel 14:27*

At the lower level of 14:27 it is reported that Absalom had three sons, and a beautiful daughter named Tamar. At the lower level of the narrative the ironist

45 Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 334.

46 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 50.

47 Translation from RSV.

48 Translation from RSV.

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does not mention the sons' names but does mention Tamar's name. This is anomalous as it would be expected that, if anything, Absalom's son's names would be mentioned rather than that of the name of his daughter. The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what is said, and what is meant. At the lower level there is a report of Absalom's children, at the upper level of the narrative there is the anomalous stress on Tamar's name. This anomalous stress alludes to Tamar, Absalom's sister, and by extension her rape, and the aftermath of the rape. Here the author as ironist is feigning ignorance of the allusion. As such, the author is an apparent unknowing victim of irony. Yet since the author is only pretending to be unaware of the irony—having intentionally created it—the author is merely a faux-victim of the irony. If this was not a case of dissimulation by the author it would be assumed that either the stress would be on the children equally or there would be more stress on the boys. The object of the ironic attack is Absalom, who is consumed with thoughts of vengeance.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is conveyed by means of the language and our background knowledge. As already mentioned, the verbal irony is communicated by the pointed reference to Tamar (his daughter), and the additional mention of Tamar (his daughter) as a אשה יפת.[49] This alludes to Absalom's sister, Tamar, who is also described as being beautiful (13:1). Yet, the greater anomaly is in the listing of Absalom's children; as mentioned, Absalom's sons are not referred to by name, however, his daughter is named. Caspari suggests that the attention given to details about Absalom's daughter is particularly suspicious, as elsewhere her name is Maacah (1 Kgs. 15:2). He writes, "… one therefore gains the impression that it pleased the narrator to name the daughter after the avenged sister; this would have been a moment when his predilection for conclusions rich in affinities and ideas sent him beyond what the official documents said."[50]

However, this matter requires further discussion. Hertzberg suggests that the mention of Absalom's daughter does not involve an allusion to his sister, and that a more plausible explanation for Absalom's sons not being mentioned by name is it is likely that they died young. For Hertzberg, the mention of Tamar as Absalom's daughter is highlighted because she is his only remaining child.[51] Ackroyd argues that the text may be confused, and the truth may have been that Amnon raped Absalom's daughter, rather than his sister.[52] On the other hand

49 "A beautiful woman".

50 Caspari, "The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15–20," 62.

51 Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel,* 334.

52 Peter Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

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McCarter suggests that the extended mention of Tamar, Absalom's daughter, is an allusion to Tamar, Absalom's sister.[53] It would seem that McCarter's proposition is the most plausible. It is possible that Absalom's sons had died young as Hertzberg argues, however, this does not explain the anomaly that Absalom's daughter is named as Tamar and not Maacah, in this instance. Similarly, there is an inconsistency in Ackroyd's interpretation as Tamar is continually referenced as Absalom's sister in the story of Amnon and Tamar. It is more likely, in keeping with the portrayal of Absalom, that the mention of Tamar, his daughter, is best understood as an allusion to his sister, Tamar.

Absalom's anger over Tamar's rape (13:22) precedes verse 14:27 and this, taken in conjunction with the allusion to Tamar (his sister), implies that Absalom's anger has not abated, presumably at least in part because the situation has not been resolved.[54] The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the subcategory is innuendo.

5.1.11 *2 Samuel 14:28–30*

At the lower level of 14:28 it is reported that Absalom lived for two years in Jerusalem without visiting his father. In 14:29 Absalom sends twice for Joab so that Joab might arrange for Absalom to go to David but Joab does not come. At the lower level of 14:30 Absalom orders his servants to burn Joab's property which is next door to Absalom's property. The opposition in the narrative concerns these different representations of Absalom. Specifically, there is a close confrontation of incompatibles. In 14:28–29 Absalom sends for Joab in a civilized manner. In 14:30, by contrast, Absalom is shown to be as violent and uncompromising as David is. Absalom is the object of ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, with the dominant sub-category of irony displayed.

At first glance Absalom's decision to light a fire in the field next to his own field is comical, as he is presumably putting himself in danger. However, the confrontation of incompatibles implies that the real focus of this passage is Absalom's anger, as opposed to his foolishness. Fokkelman suggests that this act of arson on Absalom's account points to his aggression.[55] Similarly Alter remarks, "Absalom's Samson-like burning of the field is a strong indication that he is a man prepared to use violence to achieve his ends: Mafia style, he

53 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 350.

54 It has been suggested Absalom ordered Amnon's execution as he sought the throne (Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 331), however, it is more prudent to assume that Absalom sought revenge against Amnon.

55 Fokkelman,"King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 150.

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presents Joab with an offer he can't refuse."[56] Caspari suggests that Absalom's failing in this case is 'intransigence.'[57]

Absalom's behaviour is not unlike David's behaviour toward Uriah. Uriah resists David's two attempts to manipulate him (2 Sam. 11:8; 13) and in frustration David implements the violent plan on the third attempt (2 Sam. 11:14–15).[58] Therefore, it may be argued that the ironist at the upper level of the narrative is critical of Absalom's scheming and violent behaviour which is not unlike David's *modus operandi* (2 Sam. 11:6–15). Accordingly, just as the narrative implies that David and Amnon are indistinguishable from one another in terms of their bad character (2 Sam. 11:6–15, 13:1–14), so too does it imply that Absalom is as morally flawed as David and Amnon (14:28–32). Ultimately, therefore the content of the irony is corruption in the monarchy.

5.1.12 *2 Samuel 14:31–32*

At the lower level of 14:31 Joab goes to Absalom and asks him why he has set Joab's field on fire. At the lower level of 14:32 Absalom replies to Joab that he sent for Joab so that Joab may send a message to the king. Absalom tells Joab to ask the king why Absalom has come from Geshur. Absalom then tells Joab to tell the king that Absalom would have been better off living in Geshur than at a distance from the king, and that if there is any guilt in Absalom then David should kill him. At the upper level of the narrative the question to the king with respect to Absalom leaving Geshur is a rhetorical question, and, as such, ironic. The opposition here is the difference between what Absalom says and what Absalom means. Absalom's question explicitly asks why he has come from Geshur, however, he implies that he wants to know why David has not permitted him to participate fully in the community. David is the object of ironic attack as the ironist, Absalom, implicitly makes a pejorative criticism of David.

The grade of the verbal irony is overt as it is immediately apprehended that Absalom is asking a rhetorical question with an implicit criticism of David. The mode of the irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category, as mentioned previously, is the rhetorical question. However, there are two questions asked. The other question is asked by Joab; Joab asks Absalom why he set Joab's field on fire. This is merely an inquiry, it is not a rhetorical question. By contrast, the

56 Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Sam*, 281.
57 Caspari, "The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15–20," 72.
58 Schulz, 152.

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other question, Absalom's question for David (14:32) is a rhetorical question. This question is:

למה באתי מגשׁור

(Why have I come from Geshur?)[59]

As we have seen, Absalom is not intending that Joab ask David why Absalom came from Geshur since this is already known to both Absalom and David. This rhetorical question is an element of Absalom's speech to Joab expressing his anger that his predicament has not been resolved by David.

However, there is an additional implication, namely, that there is no easy answer to Absalom's predicament. As has been discussed, the proper course of action for David to take in response to Absalom's unlawful act of killing Amnon, was to have Absalom killed,[60] or to leave Absalom in exile (in keeping with the story of Cain and Abel). In ordinary circumstances there would be guilt in Absalom. Thus, Absalom's remark in 14:32 is as follows:

ועתה אראה פני המלך ואם־ישׁ־בי עון והמתני

(Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king; and if there is guilt in me, let him kill me).[61]

Given the outcome of the ruse of the woman of Tekoa, David has sworn to take on Absalom's guilt, and thereby, David himself, rather than Absalom, should rightly be killed (or, at least, exiled). Therefore, there is no easy solution to Absalom's predicament.

5.1.13 *2 Samuel 14:33*

Identifying irony in 14:33 is difficult, and it is likely that this verse is a straightforward narration of events. However, there is also a possibility that irony arises from the understatement of David's act of kissing Absalom. If there is irony perhaps it is as follows.

At the lower level of 14:33 Joab goes to the king and tells him what Absalom told him to tell David. David summons Absalom, and Absalom comes to David and prostrates himself before David. David then kisses Absalom (14:32). At

59 Translation from NRS.

60 In 14:32 Absalom's remark, "Let him kill me" supports the idea that death is an appropriate punishment for Absalom killing Amnon.

61 Translation from RSV.

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the upper level of the narrative the ironist emphasises the significance of this event by using understated language. Moreover, the significance of the event is otherwise indicated. After all, restoring Absalom is contrary to the laws and even, it would appear, to Absalom's expectation of his own treatment!

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is conveyed in the language and by recourse to background knowledge. As far as the understated language is concerned, Schulz notes that 14:33 is the climax of chapter 14, yet he also notes that Absalom's reconciliation with David is described fleetingly.[62] However, regardless of the understated representation of this event, it might also be added that the wording is to some extent belaboured. In this respect Perry and Sternberg's pattern of verbosity and curt expression is helpful. The verbosity is evident in 14:33a, and the curt expression is in 14:33b. The curt expression is as follows:

וישׁק המלך לאבשׁלום

(And the king kissed Absalom).

David's kiss has variously been interpreted to mean that Absalom had been restored to favour,[63] that Absalom was kissed in order to seal his place as the future king,[64] and that the kiss was a simple greeting gesture as can be seen in Genesis 33:4; 50:1; Exodus 18:7.[65] However, given that the entire chapter has been concerned with the appropriate treatment of Absalom, it is reasonable to interpret the kiss as restoring Absalom to favour. This is in keeping with Bar-Efrat's suggestion that the mention of[66] מלך three times in this verse, emphasizes an official atmosphere, and is otherwise devoid of the personal warmth that may be expected of the reunion of a father and son.[67]

The complexity in respect of Absalom's restoration has been handled by David in an injudicious manner, as was the manner in which David chose to deal with the situation of Uriah and Bathsheba.[68] The criticism in this regard, then, is that David has unrightfully restored Absalom as the heir to the throne, and even though in doing so David has been true to his oath, nevertheless, it has been brought about only through trickery. This does not portray a king who

62 Schulz, "Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel," 124.
63 Conroy, *Absalom!* 103.
64 Schulz, "Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel," 124.
65 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 191.
66 "king"
67 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 157.
68 Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 335.

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administers justice adequately for the good of the community. The content of the irony is David's inability of administer justice effectively and David is the object of ironic attack. An additional irony is supplied by Marcus who suggests that it is ironic that David kisses Absalom as a sign of restoration given that Absalom later (2 Sam. 15:5) uses kisses as a means of gaining support for his revolution.[69]

5.1.14 *Summary of 2 Samuel 14:1–33*

This chapter is full of characters who act deceptively or otherwise immorally or unlawfully. Joab tricks David into swearing an oath that David does not want to uphold. The woman of Tekoa is the agent of Joab's deception. Even the fictitious blood-avenger is motivated by inheritance. David upholds the oath that he is held to, however, he appears to do it begrudgingly, and Absalom can be accused of being deceptive when he tricks Joab into championing him further to David. The ironic criticism in the text might then concern the matrix of corruption, as opposed to obedience to Yahweh, which comes through in this narrative.

In 14:1–3 there is an insinuation that Joab's plan is deceptive. 14:4–7 is an example of the sub-category of impersonal irony, pretended defence of the victim, where David's incompetence is 'defended'. 14:8–11 is an example of overstatement. In this instance, David, who is the victim of the irony, is tricked into taking an oath which absolves Absalom of any punishment for Amnon's death. 14:12–14 uses a rhetorical question to highlight the oath which David has taken on. In 14:15–17, the sub-category of irony called praise in order to blame, suggests that David is not a good administrator of justice.

In 14:18–20 the sub-category of praise in order to blame highlights the fact that David does not know what is going on around him. In 14:21–23 irrelevant praise is given by Joab. This falls under the sub-category of irony, praise in order to blame. Joab thanks David for his favour, despite knowing that he tricked David. In 14:25–26 Absalom's perfection is overstated. This leads into an insinuation that Absalom is planning to take the throne. In 14:27 there is an innuendo which comes with the mention of Absalom's daughter, Tamar. 14:28–30 is an example of irony displayed, which points to Absalom's aggression. In 14:31–32 a rhetorical question elucidates the confusion of the narrative by suggesting that Absalom should not have left Geshur, and that David has not successfully administered justice in this instance. 14:33 closes the chapter

69 I am indebted to David Marcus for this comment.

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with understated language which points to an unresolved reconciliation between Absalom and David.[70]

70 At this stage in the narrative it is worth noting the parallels between the story of Saul's demise and the present story of King David. In doing so, the reader becomes aware that David is failing as a king in this narrative, from the perspective of a parallel narrative. In 1 Samuel 14:1 Jonathan does not tell Saul that he is fighting with the Philistines, just as Absalom kept his intentions regarding Amnon a secret (13:23–27). Saul commits himself to a rash oath which ends up having implications for his son (1 Sam. 14:24). Similarly, David is tricked into committing to an oath which involves his son (14:10–11). Jonathan does not know of Saul's oath (1 Sam. 14:27), just as Absalom did not know of David's oath (14:32). Jonathan rebels against his father's oath (1 Sam. 14:29), Absalom rebels against David's decision (14:32). Saul builds the first altar to the Yahweh (1 Sam. 14:35), David wants to build the first temple to the Yahweh (2 Sam. 7:2). God does not answer Saul (1 Sam. 37), just as God does not respond to David's fasting (2 Sam. 12:22–23). God discerned that guilt was in Saul and Jonathan, but not in the people (1 Sam. 14:41), similarly, the guilt in Absalom is reputed to have been transferred to David (2 Sam. 14:9). In 1 Samuel 14:44 Saul attempts to take on Jonathan's guilt. The people of Israel rescued Jonathan from God's judgement so that not one hair should fall onto the ground (1 Sam. 14:45), David ensures that not one of Absalom's hairs should fall to the ground (2 Sam. 14:11). In 1 Samuel 15:9 Saul takes the spoils of war, and in 2 Samuel 12:30 David takes the spoils of war. Saul is rejected in 1 Samuel 15:10, and David is rejected in 2 Samuel 12:24–25. Saul did evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Sam. 15:19), as David did evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Sam. 12:9). Saul recognises that he has sinned in the eyes of God (1 Sam. 15:24), just as David did (2 Sam. 12:13). Saul's sin leads to his rejection (1 Sam. 15:26), and into the narrative of the anointing of David in 1 Samuel 16.

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CHAPTER 6

Absalom's Revolt

6.1 2 Samuel 15–18

6.1.1 *2 Samuel 15:1*

At the lower level of 15:1 it is reported that Absalom obtained a chariot, horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom intends to mount a challenge to the throne, given that the chariot, horses, and running men constitute a small army. Here there is an opposition between what is explicitly reported and what is implied. Absalom is the object of ironic attack since the implication, indeed insinuation, concerns his treasonable actions. The content of the irony is Absalom's intended challenge to the throne.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of the verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is insinuation.[1] As stated above, the insinuation is that Absalom's display of chariot, horses, and running men constitutes a royal challenge.[2] This insinuation is consistent with Mauchline's remark that Absalom's retinue was in fact a private army,[3] and also with Anderson's comment that חמשים is a standard military unit as found in Exodus 18:21 and Deuteronomy 1:15.[4] The insinuation claim is more plausible than the claim that horses and chariots were merely symbols of royal status and that, therefore, Absalom's retinue did not indicate the signs of the beginning stages of a revolt.[5]

Furthermore, the argument that Absalom was in the early stages of mounting a challenge against David's throne is strengthened by 1 Samuel 8:11, which strongly implies that Absalom was acting as a king might:

1 Insinuation is the dominant sub-category of irony in this verse. However, an argument may also be made for overstatement as a lesser sub-category of irony in this instance. Baldwin argues that Absalom's attendants were extravagant and theatrical (Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 257). Similarly, Hertzberg (336) argues that Absalom's display was propaganda (Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel,* 336).

2 Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Sam*, 283. Alter also suggests that this verse makes a mockery of the praise from the woman of Tekoa who speaks of David as knowing everything which is going on around him (2 Sam. 14:20). This claim supports the irony in this verse which is spoken of in-depth in the previous chapter.

3 Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 269.

4 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 194.

5 McKane, *I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary*, 248.

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> ויאמר זה יהוה משפט המלך אשר ימלך עליכם את־בניכם יקח ושם לו במרכבתו ובפרשיו ורצו לפני מרכבתו
> (He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots").[6]

The insinuation (that Absalom will act unlawfully) is strengthened by the allusion to 1 Samuel 8:11, since not only is Absalom acting as a king might act, but he is acting as a corrupt king might act. It is also worth noting that the information in this verse strengthens the claim that David's judgement to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem was ill-conceived.

Of note, there is a complexity in this verse as Absalom's threat to David's kingship is in keeping with God's promise to punish David in 2 Samuel 12:10–11. Thereby, although the challenge to David's throne comes in the distinct form of Absalom, who is dissatisfied with David's inability to exercise judgement correctly (2 Sam. 13:21–22, 13:23–37, 14:32), Absalom's challenge is actually part of God's punishment of David (2 Sam. 12:10–11), and is therefore preordained.

6.1.2 *2 Samuel 15:2–3*

At the lower level of 15:2 Absalom arose early, stood beside the road near the gate of the city, and asked the people who had come in order to bring a case before the king for judgement, what city they were from. When the people answered that they were from a tribe of Israel, Absalom responded that their cases were "good and right," but that nobody had been appointed by the king's office to hear the cases (15:3). Absalom's assertion is not credible since there is evidence of the king exercising his own judgement in three verses in 2 Samuel. In 8:15 it is reported that David administered justice to the people, in 12:1–6 David passes judgement in the case of the rich man, and in 14:10 David passes judgement in the case of the woman from Tekoa. Therefore, it can be assumed that there was somebody to hear the people's claims. Moreover, Absalom would have known this and, crucially, also known that it was the king and not some appointee who exercised judgement in these cases; indeed, this was an important role of the king. Further, the people who had come to bring their case before the king would also have known all this. Therefore, Absalom's assertion is a pretence. Specifically, he is pretending that he does not know that it is an important role of the king to exercise judgment in these cases. So, Absalom in performing this act of pretended ignorance is implying that David is an *incompetent* administrator of justice, and by extension, an incompetent

6 Translation from RSV.

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king. In dismissing the king in this manner, Absalom sets himself up as a perfect replacement (at least in his own view of himself) in the next episode.

The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant. Although Absalom says that there is nobody deputed by the king to hear their claims, the evidence suggests that the king would hear the people's cases and that they would know this. Absalom's remark that a position existed whereby a representative of the king would hear claims is plainly a deceit. No position is mentioned in the lists of David's officials (2 Sam. 8:15). David is the object of Absalom's ironic attack. However, there is a further irony and Absalom is the object of this second ironic attack. Moreover, Absalom himself is the confidently unaware victim of this second instance of irony. For Absalom takes a stance of moral superiority in relation to David, despite the fact that he is the beneficiary of David's incompetence. Specifically, as previously discussed, Absalom was responsible for the unlawful killing of Amnon, and the just outcome of Amnon's unlawful killing was either death or exile for Absalom. But David permitted Absalom to go unpunished and did so as a result of trickery—trickery that Absalom is blissfully unaware of. It can be assumed that Absalom wrongly believes that there is no legitimate guilt in him (14:33), for the reason that David has restored him to his former position in Jerusalem. Yet, the reader knows that Absalom is only in Jerusalem because David was tricked by the woman of Tekoa.

Further discussion is needed in reference to Absalom's ironic attack on David. Here the grade of verbal irony is overt as Absalom's' pretence will be immediately apparent to his audience, given their background knowledge. Moreover, it belongs to the sub-category of pretended ignorance. As far as the background knowledge of the narrative is concerned, 15:2 indicates that Absalom positioned himself in the context of a formal legal setting. Meir Malul remarks,

> This court of law was convened in the שער (gate), the known place of judgement and other legal transactions in ancient times, and early in the morning …, when courts of law used to convene in ancient times. The Judges (and litigants/defendants) are said to stand to pass judgement, as it is said about Absalom too.[7]

Yet, the irony arises in 15:3 as Absalom tells the people:

7 Meir Malul, "Absalom's Chariot and Fifty Runners (II Samuel 15,1) and Hittite Laws §198 Legal Proceedings in the Ancient Near East," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*. 122, no. 1 (2010), 44–52, 46.

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ויאמר אליו אבשלום ראה דברך טובים ונכהים ושמע אין־לך מאת המלך
(Absalom would say, "See your claims are good and right; but there is no one deputed by the king to hear you").[8]

This statement, on Absalom's part, is problematic, as the people are waiting for judgement from the king (15:2). This difficulty has led to the argument that David had begun to neglect administering justice,[9] or that it was difficult to get a hearing before the king because of bureaucratic incompetence.[10] These claims are potentially true. However, it cannot be denied that Absalom's words are misleading since the people had come to put their case before the king as was customary.[11]

Absalom's dismissiveness of the king as incompetent, taken in context, implies that Absalom wanted to be the king. For instance, the people did not come to Absalom but instead he called out to them (15:2). This suggests that he redirected the people from where they intended to go, which was presumably to the king so that their claims could be heard (15:2).[12] The insinuation here is that Absalom was actively vying for the king's role as judge. The evidence for such an insinuation is strengthened by our knowledge of Absalom's anger towards David described in the previous chapters (2 Sam. 14:32).

6.1.3 *2 Samuel 15:4–6*

At the lower level of 15:4 Absalom remarks that if he were judge he would give justice to everybody who brought cases to him. In 15:5 Absalom kisses the hands of the people who come near to him to do obeisance. In 15:6 it is reported that Absalom treats every Israelite who comes to the king for judgement in this way and that he stole the hearts of the people of Israel. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom's actions were manipulative and that he was seeking to ingratiate himself with the people. The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant.

Absalom's attempt at ingratiation, in the context of our background knowledge of the text, suggests that Absalom is vying to be king. For instance, although Absalom tells the people in 15:3 that there is nobody who is deputed by

8 Translation from the NRS.

9 McKane, *I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary*, 249.

10 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 195.

11 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 257.

12 Interestingly, the only plaintiff with a ריב in the books of Samuel is David. In 1 Sam. 24:16 David implores Yahweh to judge his complaint against Saul, and in 1 Sam. 25:39 David gives thanks to God for settling his complaint by killing Nabal.

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the king to hear them in 15:4 he does not suggest that he should be a hearer for the king, but instead a שפט.[13] This indicates that Absalom is making a claim for the throne.[14] We can assume this because when the Israelites asked Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:5 to give them a king, their sole request was that he would be their judge. Moreover, in 1 Samuel 8:20 the Israelites ask Samuel for a שפטנו מלכנו[15] to go out to battle before them. In short, the Israelites want a king who has both the role of a judge and that of a military leader. Arguably, Absalom's small army (collection of a chariot, horses and running men in 15:1) is a symbolic reference to the request for a military leader. Evidently, then, these verses challenge Herrmann's argument that Absalom was appealing to the tradition of the judges, over the tradition of kings.[16]

We have seen that the ironist is implying that Absalom is trying to steal the throne. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is insinuation. The insinuation is heightened in 15:5. In this verse Absalom acts as a modern-day politician on a campaign trail might garnering popularity in an attempt to secure power.[17] This way of proceeding is in itself inappropriate since it is God who chooses the king; it is not meant to be a popularity contest. Like David in 2 Samuel 14:33 Absalom's kisses to the people of Israel are insincere, indeed manipulative.[18] The deceptiveness is further explored in 15:6b:

ויגנב אבשלום את־לב אנשי ישראל

(… so Absalom deceived the men of Israel).[19]

This expression does not mean that Absalom captivated the hearts of the people, but rather that Absalom deceived the people or stole their will. The antecedent of ויגנב את־לב is found in Genesis 31:20 where Jacob clearly deceives Laban:

ויגנב יעקב את־לב לבן[20]

13 "judge".

14 Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 270.

15 "king may judge" Translation from NAS.

16 S. Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times*, trans. J. Bowden from German 1973. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 164.

17 Campbell, *2 Samuel*, 145.

18 Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Sam*, 284, and Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 258.

19 Author's translation.

20 "And Jacob deceived Laban …" Translation from NAS. McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 356. The extent of Absalom's deceit is debated. In 15:2 Absalom asks the people where they are

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In 15:4–6, Absalom is the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of irony as it would appear that Absalom is confidently unaware that he does not display the right characteristics to be a good judge or king. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is conveyed in the language and is informed by the background knowledge of the text.

It might also be argued that David is implicitly criticized in the section as his failings as a king have paved the way for an uprising. The current discontent may be traced back to David's transgressions in chapter 11 where David committed adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:4), and gave orders for Uriah's execution (2 Sam. 11:14–15). As a result of these transgressions Yahweh tells David in 2 Sam 12:11:

מקים עליך רעה מביתך

(… I will raise up evil against you out of your own house …)[21]

This is confirmed in chapter 13 when Amnon rapes Tamar (2 Sam. 13:14), and in the retaliatory killing of Amnon ordered by Absalom (2 Sam. 13:29). It could be said that Absalom's anger would have been abated had David punished Amnon (2 Sam. 13:21–22). It can certainly be maintained that Absalom was frustrated that David would not pass a definitive judgement in his own case (2 Sam. 14:32), and that this fuelled his present subversive action. This narrative then outlines the extent of the troubles which are brought about by disobeying God's laws.

6.1.4 *2 Samuel 15:7–9*

At the lower level of 15:7 it is reported that after forty years Absalom asked the king if he (Absalom) could go to Hebron and pay the vow that he had made to the Lord. In 15:8 Absalom goes on to say that he made a vow while he lived in Geshur: if the Lord brings him back to Jerusalem, Absalom will then worship the Lord in Hebron. In 15:9 the king tells Absalom to go in peace, so Absalom

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from, and when the people tell him they are from Israel, he shows partiality in his judgement towards them (15:3). In 15:6 the Israelites are mentioned twice. Thereby, there is an emphasis on the people of Israel. This emphasis has led scholars to debate who Absalom was trying to gain favour with. McKane argues that Absalom is only speaking to the men of Israel as the northern tribes, given that the supplicants had travelled to Jerusalem to have their complaints heard (McKane, *I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary*, 250). Similarly, Mauchline argues that it would appear in 15:6 that Absalom is addressing the tribes of northern Israel, given that he was more popular there (Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*).

21 Translation from RSV.

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goes to Hebron. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom intends to go to Hebron for the purpose of usurping the throne. This implication is strengthened by the mention of Absalom's belief that God is on his side (15:8). The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant. The sub-category of impersonal irony, in this instance, is insinuation.

The ironist insinuates that Absalom is going to Hebron to usurp the throne. The grade of the verbal irony, in this instance, is covert as it is conveyed in the anomalous language and only fully understood with reference to the background knowledge of the text. As far as the anomalous language is concerned, 15:7 begins this section with the problematic statement that Absalom went to speak to the king at the end of ארבעים שנה.[22] It would seem implausible to suggest that Absalom waited forty years to do this, which has commonly caused scholars to suggest that this is an error which is better read as four years, as it is written in the Syriac versions and the Vulgate.[23] I would argue that forty years is an exaggeration or an overstatement and that this is an instance of verbal irony. The overstatement emphasises the insinuation that Absalom is going to challenge the throne. Here the figure of forty years alludes to the forty years of David's reign over Israel.[24] Accordingly, the implication is that David has reigned for a long time, perhaps too long, and that therefore a challenge to the throne from Absalom is likely.

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22 "forty years".

23 O. Thenius, *Die Bücher Samuelis* (Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament Bd. 4: Leipzig, 1864) 216; H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC: Edinburgh 1899), 342; K. Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament VIII; Tübingen 1902), 270; H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Samuelbücher* (ATD 10: Göttingen 1960), 276 *I & II Sam. A Commentary* (London 1964) 355; Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 270; Fokkelman, "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 454; Barthelemy, *Critique.* 271–272; P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel. A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB 9: Garden City 1984), 355; R. P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel. A Commentary* (Exeter 1986), 271: Anderson, *WBC, Vol. n. 2 Samuel,* 193. n.7a; *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids 1978); *The New Jerusalem Bible* (London 1985); *The Revised English Bible* (Oxford 1989)" Robert Althann, "The meaning of 'rb'ym shnh in 2 Sam 15:7," *Bib* 73, no. 2 (1992), 248–252, 248–249. It may be more plausible to argue as Althann does, that שנה is better interpreted as a verb which repeats or intensifies an expression, and that the amount of time is better interpreted within the context of the narrative. Althann's interpretation of this verse is, "And at the end of forty days Absalom spoke insistently to the king, "Please may I go and fulfil my vow, which I made to the Lord, in Hebron"' (Althann, 248). However, Forty days would appear to be a short amount of time for Absalom who has previously been shown to brood for some time (2 Sam. 13:23; 14:28).

24 A comment by David Marcus.

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The background information which indicates an insinuation in the narrative concerns David's history with Hebron. Absalom's decision to go to Hebron is striking, given David's history with the city. In 2 Samuel 2:1 the Lord tells David to go to Hebron, where David became the king of Judah in Hebron for seven years and six months (2 Sam. 2:11). In 2 Samuel 5:3 the elders of the Northern tribes of Israel came to Hebron, and David made a covenant with them. This resulted in David being anointed as the king over all of Israel. Furthermore, Hertzberg suggests that the Hebronites were hostile towards David for moving the holy capital to Jerusalem.[25] Thereby, it can be assumed that Absalom's actions are provocative and that his intention may be to usurp the throne, strengthening the idea of an insinuation in this passage.

However, the argument that Absalom went to Hebron in order to begin a revolution against David is contentious. Alter suggests that this vow may have been a vow of penance,[26] it may also be the case that Absalom was making a routine vow as a temporary Nazirite. McCarter argues that the vow that Absalom made was to the Hebronite Yahweh and could therefore not be honoured in Jerusalem.[27] Yet, Fokkelman suggests that Absalom is feigning piety in order to trick David into allowing him to go to Hebron where he intended to uphold the vow that he made to himself to take revenge and usurp David's position.[28] This latter interpretation would seem to be correct in the light of Absalom's small army, efforts at ingratiation with the people of Israel etc. It is also in keeping with the other deceptions in the SN where members of the royal court feign civil behaviour in order to achieve corrupt ends.

Let me now turn to the ironic content of the insinuation that Absalom is intending to usurp the throne. In 15:8b Absalom says:

> אם ישיבני יהוה ירושלם ועבדתי את־יהוה
> (If the LORD indeed brings me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord).[29]

This verse suggests that Absalom believes that God is on his side, specifically, that Absalom is righteous since God has chosen to restore him to Jerusalem. However, the reader knows that the only reason that Absalom is back in Jerusalem is because the woman of Tekoa tricked David into bringing Absalom

25 Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 337.
26 Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 284.
27 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 356.
28 Fokkelman, "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 170–171.
29 Translation from NKJ.

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out of exile in chapter 14.[30] This indicates that Absalom is confidently unaware that it was not at Yahweh's instigation that he was returned to Jerusalem. Instead, Joab was the architect of Absalom's return, as Joab hired a successful actress and counted on David's foolishness. If it were the case that Yahweh brought it about that Absalom was returned to Jerusalem, then God's laws and punishments would have been compromised.

Absalom intends to usurp the throne. He does so in the belief that he is God's chosen one since God is responsible for returning him from exile. However, it is a trick played on David by Joab that has in fact caused him to be returned him from exile. So, ironically, Absalom's intended action, far from being righteous is actually treasonous. In this episode Absalom is the object of ironic attack. Moreover, Absalom's confident unawareness of what is actually going on makes him a victim of irony.

6.1.5 *2 Samuel 15:10*

At the lower level of 15:10 Absalom sends messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to tell them to shout that Absalom has become the king at Hebron and do so as soon as they hear the trumpet. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist knows that David is the king of Israel and, indeed, the rightful king, and that there is no credible evidence to suggest that Absalom has gained Yahweh's favour. Of course, Absalom wrongly suspects that his return to Jerusalem is a result of God's intervention and that, therefore, he is the rightful king. As already mentioned, it is clear that God works through human agents, and God's actions can be seen in events, but it would be inconsistent for God to initiate action that is contrary to the law, i.e. returning Absalom to Jerusalem. The opposition in the narrative is between Absalom's claim to be the rightful king and our background knowledge that he is not. It is ironic that Absalom, a transgressor and beneficiary of trickery, believes himself to be the rightful king. Absalom is, therefore, the object of the ironic attack. He is also the unknowing victim of the irony since it is his hubris that causes him to think that he has God's favour.

30 This complexity could be a case of dramatic irony whereby, the character in the narrative is unaware of an important element of the story which is known to the reader. However, to call this event an example of dramatic irony is to downplay the arrogance of Absalom and the critical message of the impersonal ironist. Although these forms of irony can be similar, distinctions can be made in the different functions of the irony. For example, impersonal irony moralises, whereas dramatic irony is comical. Furthermore, impersonal irony is concerned with the message of the narrative, and the hope that vices will be exposed in order that they may be learned from, whereas dramatic irony is more concerned with irony for its aesthetic appeal.

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The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent, and is implied in part by our background knowledge and in part by the language used in the narrative. As has already been mentioned, we know that Absalom is not the rightful king. At the lower level this verse could be interpreted as a straightforward deception or misunderstanding on Absalom's part. However, in the text there is an emphasis on the words מלך אבשלום בחברון. This emphasis implies that Absalom is a fool since the stress is on his declaration that he is the rightful king when, of course, he is not. This ironic attack on Absalom ridicules him by way of his own misrepresentation of himself as king. Therefore, the sub-category of impersonal irony involved is misrepresentation or false statement. This sub-category of irony draws attention to what is true by way of emphasizing what is not true. The content of the irony is Absalom's belief that he is the rightful king and the fact that he is acting on this belief.

Of note, 15:10 confirms that Absalom's intention in going to Hebron was to create an uprising against David, and that he was not going for religious reasons. Absalom was similarly deceptive in 2 Samuel 13:24–27 when he tricked the king into sending Amnon to an ambush, albeit not in the service of usurping the throne but rather to avenge his sister. Absalom's deceptiveness can also be discerned in 15:6, when he steals the hearts of the people of Israel. This pattern of deceptive behaviour on the part of Absalom suggests that his actions of cutting his hair (in 2 Sam. 14:26) was not an expression of public piety, even supposing he was a Nazarite.

6.1.6 *2 Samuel 15:11*

At the lower level of 15:11 it is stated that two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom as invited guests but had no knowledge of what was going on. At the upper level the ironist is feigning ignorance and pretending that the men do not have any knowledge of Absalom's intentions, when they actually do.

The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant. The narrator tells us the men had no knowledge of what was going on, when they really did. The evidence that they did know what Absalom intended is our knowledge that Absalom sent messengers to *all* the tribes of Israel to declare himself to be king. Thereby, in 15:11 the ironist is feigning ignorance; so, the ironist is the source of the innocence in the narrative. Moreover, the grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony. The sub-category of impersonal irony is pretended error or ignorance. In this sub-category of impersonal irony the ironist pretends not to know the truth. The object of ironic attack is the two hundred men from

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Jerusalem. They are the object of pejorative criticism since they were implicated in Absalom's attempt to usurp the throne.

Of note, Fokkelman argues that the 'innocence' in this verse highlights David's ignorance of what is going on around him.

> Their innocence תמם is so strongly emphasized … that I find the designations ironic. The naivety of these simpletons recalls David's blind spot, which he shows by his apparent surprise in 15:13.[31]

I agree with Fokkelman that the men's 'innocence' is emphasised and is an indicator of irony. However, in my view, and for the reasons given, this innocence is only pretended.

6.1.7 *2 Samuel 15:12*

At the lower level of 15:12 Absalom offers sacrifices and sends for Ahithophel the Gilonite who is David's counsellor from Giloh. Verse 15:12 also states that Absalom's conspiracy grew, and more people joined him. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom is sending for someone to act as his war counsellor. Moreover, at the upper level the ironist insinuates that Absalom is a fool, given this counsellor rejoices in a name that means "My brother is folly." The opposition in the narrative is the incongruity in the prince's decision to send for a counsellor—someone who is to provide advice—yet whose name means, "My brother is folly."[32] In this episode Absalom is both the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of irony. The irony arises from the opposition between the two levels. The grade of verbal irony is overt and is apparent from the language, including the use of a name meaning "My brother is folly".

The evidence in respect of the meaning of Ahithophel's name is as follows. Hertzberg argues that Ahithophel is translated to mean "My brother is folly."[33] McCarter suggests that the name means "foolishness, insipidity."[34] Both men agree that Ahithophel is a play on the proper name Eliphelet, which translates as "God is release" or "deliverance". McCarter writes, "… Ahithophel might be a deliberate distortion satirizing the man's ill-used wisdom."[35]

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31 Fokkelman, "King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2)," 172–174.
32 Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 338.
33 Ibid.
34 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 357.
35 Ibid.

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Although the name "Absalom" is not in itself satirical it has a satirical connotation in this context; indeed, its use in this context is ironic. For the name means "Father is peace," and yet David (Absalom's father) is known for being a military king, and in this instance, Absalom is setting out to wage a war against David!

The upshot of all this is that Absalom is the object of a twofold ironic attack. It is insinuated that he is a fool for seeking war counsel from Ahithophel, but also a war-monger for planning to wage an unjust war against his father. Therefore, the symbolism arising from the combination of the meanings of the two names in this context—the meanings, "Father is peace" and "foolishness"—is deeply ironic.

The mode of verbal irony in this verse is impersonal, and the sub-category is insinuation. The insinuation is that Ahithophel is not only a fool but a war-monger.[36]

6.1.8 *2 Samuel 15:13–17*

This passage involves two distinct instances of irony. The first of these is present in the form of ridicule or "low burlesque" writing. In this form of verbal irony a person of high status is presented in a manner ordinarily reserved for a person of low status.[37]

At the lower level of 15:13 a messenger tells David that "the hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom." In 15:14 David tells his officials that they must flee or Absalom will attack them and bring disaster on them and the city. In 15:15 David's officials tell him that they are ready to do whatever David tells them to do. In 15:16 the king leaves Jerusalem with his household, except for ten concubines who are left to look after the house. In 15:17 it is stated that David left with all of the people and they stopped when they came to the last house. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that the king is a coward or is at least acting contrary to his warrior image. The opposition in the

36 Of note, in the beginning of 15:12 Absalom sends for Ahithophel who is spoken of being an advisor to David. It is possible that this Ahithophel is the same man who is spoken of in the genealogy in 2 Samuel 23:34 which lists Ahithophel as Eliam's father. This suggests that the man Absalom sends for is Bathsheba's grandfather (McCarter J., *II Samuel*, 357). If this is the case then Absalom has sent for the man who is the grandfather of the woman that David took (2 Sam. 11:4), the grandfather-in-law of the soldier that David had executed (2 Sam. 11:14–15), and unbeknownst to Absalom and Ahithophel, the man who is the great-grandfather to Yahweh's favoured prince, Solomon (2 Sam 12:24–25). Given Ahithophel's unique family connections, arguably the presence of Ahithophel in the story of Absalom's conspiracy against David, is an allusion to David's misdeeds, which pave the way for Absalom's revolt.

37 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 79.

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narrative arises from the difference between what David does in this passage (act in a cowardly manner), and what the ironist otherwise knows of David (that he is a great warrior).

David is the object of ironic attack and the grade of verbal irony is covert. The irony depends in part on our background knowledge and in part on the kind of language used. For instance, 15:14 is replete with overstated language showing David to be in an uncustomary panic:

> והדיח עלינו את־הרעה והכה העיר לפי־חרב ,מהרו ,לא־תהיה־לנו פליטה ,קומו ונברחה
> (and bring upon us evil and strike the city with the edge of the sword; hurry; we shall not escape; Arise and let us flee).[38]

Not only is the language overstated in 15:14, but it is also in stark contrast to David's controlled remark in 2 Samuel 11:25:

> אל־ירע בעיניך את־הדבר הזה כי־כזה וכזה יאכל החרב
> (Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another.)[39]

Therefore, the portrayal of David in 15:14 is radically different from in earlier verses. In earlier verses he is portrayed as calm and self-possessed. Ironically, the composed military leader is now a foolish coward. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category of impersonal irony is low burlesque.

The second instance of irony in the passage is as follows. These events narrated in 15:13–17 connect back to chapter 12. In chapter 12 God promised to punish David for his transgressions. Specifically, God said that David's wives would be taken from him (2 Samuel 12:11). However, as we saw above, the events narrated in 15:16 include David deliberately leaving his concubines behind to look after the house in the context of his panicky flight from Absalom:

> ויצא המלך וכל־ביתו ברגליו ויעזב המלך את עשׂר נשים פלגשים לשמר הבית
> (So the king left, followed by all his household, except ten concubines whom he left behind to look after the house).[40]

38 Author's translation.
39 Translation from the NKJV.
40 Translation from the NRS.

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In short, ironically, David is the architect of God's punishment of him; for it is David who decides to leave his 'wives' behind for Absalom to take.

This irony is not merely observable but is intended by the author. For it is incongruous that in the midst of fleeing Jerusalem in a panic to save his life David would organise for a group of women to remain in Jerusalem to look after the house. Moreover, this incident explicitly connects to God's punishment described in chapter 12. In 2 Samuel 12:11 God says that David's wives will be given to somebody else who will take them before everybody in Israel.

In addition, in 2 Samuel 12:10 God says that the sword will never leave David's house. In 2 Samuel 12:11 God says that trouble will be raised from within David's own house. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, if David had punished Amnon then it might be assumed that Absalom's rage would be assuaged. If David had killed Absalom or left him in exile, the revolt would not have begun. If David had taken his concubines with him then they would not be vulnerable to possible attack. Taken together, all these events suggest that David is the instigator of his own punishment.

6.1.9 *2 Samuel 15:18*

At the lower level of 15:18 it is stated that David left Israel with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all of the six hundred Gittites who followed him from Gath. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is about to wage war against Israel. Importantly, he is about to do so with mercenaries who previously were prepared to fight for the Philistines with David and against the Israelites (1 Sam. 27:2, 29:8). This portrayal of David is in stark contrast with the portrayal of David in the legend of David's rise. In the legend of David's rise David defied the Philistines and saved the Israelites. For instance, in the rise of David, David became a hero when he killed a giant Philistine with only a slingshot (1 Sam. 17:49). David slays Goliath and makes the following declaration (1 Sam. 17:45):

> אתה בא אלי בחרב ובתנית ובכידון ואנכי בא־אליך בשם יהוה צבאות אלהי מערכות ישראל אשר חרפת
>
> (You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied).[41]

In contrast, the mention of the Cherethites, Pelethites, and Gittites in the current verse, is a reminder of David's days of fighting on behalf of the Philistines.

41 Translation from the RSV.

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For instance, Auld suggests that the word פלתי is an alternative spelling for פלשתי, and therefore it would seem reasonable to assume that these were the men who fought with David and the Philistines.[42] Moreover, it is documented that six-hundred men followed him to Gath (1 Sam. 27:2). These men are presumably the same men who are mentioned in 15:18. Further, David was told by Achish, the king of the Philistines that it was necessary for David to fight with the Philistines against all of Israel (1 Sam. 28:1) and David was prepared to do this. However, David was dismissed from the Philistine army (1 Sam. 29:1–11), despite his protestations because Achish did not trust him. (1 Sam. 29:8). The implication of 15:18—taken in conjunction with 1 Samuel 28:1; 29:1–11, is that David is disloyal to Israel and generally untrustworthy. This portrayal of David is a parody of David in the legend of David's rise—a heroic figure steadfastly loyal to Israel.

In 15:18 David is the object of the ironic attack and the grade of verbal irony is covert. The irony relies on background knowledge. The mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is parody.

6.1.10 *2 Samuel 15:19–20*

At the lower level of 15:19 David asks Ittai the Gittite why he is coming with them. David tells him to go back and stay with the king because Ittai is a foreigner and an exile. In 15:20 David says that Ittai came to Israel not long ago and asks Ittai if David should make him join David in exile. David tells Ittai to go back and to take his kinsfolk with him, and gives him a blessing. At the upper level of the narrative, in asking these questions David is implicitly making statements, i.e. these are rhetorical questions. As will shortly emerge, the implication of these rhetorical questions is that David does not trust Ittai and would like him to return to Israel. The opposition is between what David explicitly says in his questions to Ittai and what David implies.

The implied content of these rhetorical questions relies in part on our background knowledge and in part on features of the language used in the passage. For instance, the words that David uses in his command to Ittai are unusual, notably, David's mention of Absalom as king. There is confusion in the story as the narrator speaks of David as the king, and David speaks of Absalom as the king. Hertzberg argues that this is not an instance of irony. Instead, he argues that David's speech is the appropriate manner to talk to a foreign soldier.[43] However, this argument presupposes that David recognises Absalom as the king. If this is not the case, reference to the king may either be seen to

42 Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2011), 508.

43 Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 342.

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be sarcastic, or a test of Ittai's loyalty. It is difficult to know which interpretation is better in this case. Fortunately, the rhetorical questions give us additional clues.

The first rhetorical question in this section is as follows (15:19):

למה תלך גם־אתה אתנו

(Why are you also coming with us?)[44]

In this instance it can be assumed that David is not truly interested in why Ittai is going with him. If this were to be the case it would seem logical that David would wait for a response to the question. David does not wait for a response but instead commands Ittai to return to Jerusalem (15:19).

The second rhetorical question arises in 15:20. In 15:20 David says: "You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, while I go wherever I can?" David is clearly not interested in determining whether Ittai wants David to make him follow him around. After all, immediately prior to asking this rhetorical question David had told Ittai to return to Jerusalem. Moreover, David told Ittai to return to Jerusalem because of Ittai's status as a foreigner and an exile who has not been in Israel long. In 15:18 we learnt that the majority of people who went with David, were in fact, exiled foreigners. The difference between Ittai and these other exiled foreigner's rests, then, on the amount of time that Ittai had lived in Jerusalem. Ittai had only been in Jerusalem for a short amount of time (15:20), whereas David's other soldiers had been with him for a long time (8:18).

Baldwin takes the majority position and argues that this episode is a good example of David's kindness. Indeed, she remarks, "Such thoughtfulness in a time of stress shows David at his best."[45] The difficulty with this proposition however, is that it is not consistent with how the narrative has portrayed David thus far. It is unlikely that the narrator would suddenly and radically change David's behaviour and character in the midst of the narrative. Therefore, it is reasonable to look for other reasons why David suggests to Ittai to turn around and return to Jerusalem.

One possible answer is that Ittai had not been in David's company long enough to earn his trust. Thereby, it would be risky to keep an unknown person close-by given the political situation. However, it would not be risky to send Ittai back to Jerusalem believing that David is doing him a favour. This claim is in keeping with Campbell's suggestion that the dialogue between David and

44 Translation from the NRS.

45 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 260.

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Ittai is an example of diplomatic discourse.[46] Thereby, the message in the first rhetorical question is "Do not come with us." The message in the second rhetorical question is, "I have not known you long enough to trust you as I hide from Absalom."

The passage concludes with David's seemingly heartfelt farewell blessing of Ittai:

> את־אחיך עמך חסד ואמת
>
> (Go back, take your fellow countrymen with you; and may the LORD show you mercy and faithful love).[47]

However, arguably, this is a politically motivated act on the part of David. David is the object of the ironic attack, as he acts as a devious politician might. Ittai may or may not be the unknowing victim of irony depending on whether or not he apprehends the implied content of David's rhetorical questions. We return to this matter in the next section. The grade of verbal irony is covert as the implied content of the rhetorical questions is not immediately apprehended.

6.1.11 *2 Samuel 15:21–22*

At the lower level of 15:21 Ittai says to the king that as long as the king lives and wherever the king will be, Ittai will be the king's servant. In 15:22 David says to Ittai to pass by, and Ittai and everybody with Ittai pass by. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Ittai ingratiates himself with David. The opposition in the narrative arises from the subtle difference between what is said and what is meant. Ittai says that he is loyal to the king, however, as mentioned, he is ingratiating himself with David. David is the unknowing victim of irony, since his own ironic rhetorical questions (15:19–20) have left him vulnerable to Ittai's flattering response. Whether or not Ittai was aware of David's dissimulation in the previous section cannot be answered with certainty.[48] If Ittai is aware of David's dissimulation then he is not a victim

46 Campbell, *2 Samuel* 147.

47 Author's translation.

48 Campbell gives a good suggestion of Ittai's intentions. "Equally diplomatic, Ittai is given a heroic response: 'wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be.' (v.21) The inevitable question for any diplomat or counsellor is whether these statements are to be taken at face value or understood as courtly diplomacy. Ittai professes heroically unswerving loyalty; no reason is given why he should. Is his profession of loyalty backed by his political and military acumen? Does he expect David to emerge as winner from the confrontation ahead? Does the elegance of his language conceal shrewd judgement that backs a winner? We are not told. Ittai's speech favours

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of David's ironic rhetorical questions. Moreover, it can be assumed that Ittai is dissimulating in response and, therefore, is merely a faux-victim, i.e. he is pretending to be an unknowing victim. If, on the other hand, Ittai did not grasp the ironic content in David's rhetorical questions then Ittai is an actual unknowing victim of David's ironic rhetorical questions. Given the overstatement in the language used by Ittai it is more likely that Ittai was in fact dissimulating and is, therefore, merely a faux victim.

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is overstatement. The overstatement in this verse relies on repetition and the placement of words. The repetition is evident with respect to key words. The word מלך appears three times, references to life similarly appear thrice (2x חי and חיים). The word אדוני appears twice, as does the word יהוה. Another anomaly in 15:21 is the placement of the word death before the word life.

6.1.12 *2 Samuel 15:23*

It might be suggested that there is no irony in 15:23. However, there is still an obvious incongruity in the situation.

At the lower level of 15:23 the country weeps as David passes over into the wilderness. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is officially an exile when he crosses the נחל קדרון which is considered to be the boundary of the city.[49] This event is juxtaposed with Absalom's return from exile (2 Sam. 14:21). The commonality in both of these situations is that they are unlawful events. Absalom's return has no basis in either the laws of Israel, or the case study of Cain and Abel. David's exile, although brought about by his failure to administer justice, is unlawful, as there is no evidence to suggest that God has marked Absalom as the new king. Absalom's belief that it was God who brought him back from exile (2 Sam. 15:8) is erroneous, as it was the trickery of Joab and the woman of Tekoa which facilitated his return (2 Sam. 14:1–21). Absalom's return is in fact contrary to God's decrees. Arguably, the ironist is feigning ignorance of the incongruity. If so then the ironist is the faux-victim in the narrative. The grade of verbal irony is covert. The mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is irony displayed; a category in which the irony arises from the events of the narrative. The content of the irony is the instability in the monarchy.

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loyalty; the narrator's context may be thought to favour shrewdness and acumen. It may have been both." Ibid.

49 Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 184.

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6.1.13 *2 Samuel 15:24–29*

At the lower level of 15:24 Abiathar, Zadok, and all of the Levites come up carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set the ark down until all of the people pass by. In 15:25 David tells Zadok to return the ark of the covenant back to the city. David reasons that if he is in God's favour, God will return him to Jerusalem where he can see the ark and the city. In 15:26 David says, if God is not pleased with him then God should do what he wants with David. At the lower level of 15:27 David tells Zadok to go back to the city with Abiathar, and their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan. In 15:28 David says that he will wait at the fords of the wilderness until Zadok brings back word to David. In 15:29 Zadok and Abiathar return the ark of the covenant of God back to the city and stay there.

It is a matter of background knowledge that there is a tradition of the king having the ark with him in battle since it indicates God's presence. Therefore, we can assume that David would want the ark to be with him in battle. Nevertheless, at the explicit level, David sends the priests away with the ark because he says that he has faith that God will restore him in Jerusalem, if this is part of God's plan. However, at the implicit level of 15:27–29 it appears that David had a different reason for sending the priests back to Jerusalem—he wanted to use them as spies. In this regard, returning the ark acts as a cover-story.[50] The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant. What David says is that he wants Zadok and Abiathar to return the ark to Jerusalem, as it is God who will decide if he is to see the city again of not. However, it can be assumed that David does want the ark to be with him in which case David has decided that a spy network is more useful to him at this point than the ark. The implication of David's organizing a spy network is that he ultimately wants to return from exile. Yet this decision in favour of the spy network does imply a lack of faith in the traditions of Israel since, as mentioned, the ark of the covenant was thought to indicate God's presence on the battlefield. Moreover, David is in effect using the transport of the ark of the covenant by the priests as a cover for the creation of his spy network. Ironically, then, David is displaying a lack of faith in God, indeed disrespecting God's sacred object (the ark), while claiming to be motivated by faith in God. Therefore, David is the object of ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the communication of the ironic content relies on the language used and on our background knowledge.

50 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 204.

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Regarding the language used, the rhetorical question in 15:27 is somewhat unclear:

הרואה אתה

There is a debate concerning the exact translation of it. De Groot and Carlson translate it to mean, "You are no seer, are you?"[51] On the other hand, Anderson interprets this statement as "Are you not an observant man?"[52] Either way, this statement is a rhetorical question.[53] This is consistent with the verse being ironic. However, Anderson's interpretation that David is implicitly asking the men to be spies is more plausible. For one thing, David would need to avoid explicitly instructing the priests to be spies, using the ark as their cover; instead, he would need to imply this. For another thing, the spy interpretation is supported by David's statement that he will wait to meet them, for he would need to meet them in order to hear their intelligence report (15:28).

Baldwin provides another perspective. Baldwin suggests that David is not superstitious in relation to the ark and does not see the need to have it with him in battle.[54] However, the suggestion that David is not superstitious in relation to the ark is not consistent with David's past behaviour in relation to the ark which manifested his superstition.[55]

Consistent with Baldwin's view, Fokkelman argues that David surrenders himself to his faith in Yahweh.[56] Fokkelman goes on to argue that it is indicative of David's maturity that he has faith in God yet does not rely on God to realise his plans. He speaks of this as 'synergism'.[57] As a general theoretical point concerning the relationship between faith in God and human action,

51 J. De Groot, *II Samuel*, Groningen/den Haag/Batavia, 1935, a.l.; R. A. Carlson, *David the chosen King*, Stockholm, 1964, 173, 175.

52 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 204.

53 For a different perspective, see. J. Hoftijzer, "A Peculiar Question: A Note on 2 Sam. XV 27", 606–609.

54 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 261.

55 Previously David sought to bring the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:1–5). Yet, Uzzah was struck by the Lord when he reached out to steady the ark (2 Sam. 6:6–7). This made David fearful of taking the ark to Jerusalem and he left it in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite who was blessed for having the ark (2 Sam. 6:10–11). Upon hearing this David retrieved the ark and brought it to the city (2 Sam. 6:12). David then decided to build a house for the Lord so that the ark would not have to reside in a tent (2 Sam. 7:2). In response to David's initiative God made a covenant with David that his 'house' would be secure and enduring (2 Sam. 7:16).

56 Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 186.

57 Ibid., 187.

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Fokkelman's argument is in my view unexceptionable. However, I do not accept that David's behaviour displays this level of maturity. David's behaviour is disrespectful to the traditions of Israel; specifically, his cynical use of the priests and the ark in the service of his spy network. Such disrespect is not the same thing as not being superstitious.

6.1.14 *2 Samuel 15:31*

2 Samuel 15:31 confirms the irony in 2 Samuel 15:25–26. In 2 Samuel 15:25–26 David sends the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem and says that he has faith that God will restore him in Jerusalem, if this is part of God's plan. Yet, in 2 Samuel 15:31 David implores God to help him. Mauchline has identified this inconsistency when he argues, "His prayer that Ahithophel's wisdom should be turned to foolishness shows that David could not accept this news [the news that Ahithophel is conspiring with Absalom against David] with the equanimity and trust in God which he had shown in sending the Ark back to Jerusalem."[58] This inconsistency supports the view put forward in my above discussion of 2 Samuel 15:25–26 according to which these verses involve verbal irony. As stated, on my view, David did in fact want the ark to be with him, nevertheless, he deemed a spy network to be more useful to him than the ark at that point.

Of note, David's desire for God's help is given emphasis by the irregular language in this verse. For instance, the verse begins with the words, ודוד הגיד לאמר and repeats the word אמר just before David says, סכל־נא את־עצת אחיתפל יהוה. The repetition of "David says", etc. emphasizes the content of what David says, which in this instance may be translated as, "O Lord, I pray you, turn the counsel of my brother of folly[59] into foolishness."

6.1.15 *2 Samuel 15:32–37*

It is explicitly stated in 15:32 that David comes to the summit where God is worshipped and Hushai appears in a dishevelled state. In 15:33 David tells Hushai that if he goes with David he will only be a burden. In 15:34 David tells Hushai to return to Jerusalem, become Absalom's servant, and defeat Ahithophel's advice. In 15:35 David tells Hushai to relay whatever he hears from the king's house to Zadok and Abiathar. In 15:36 David says that the sons of Zadok and Abiathar will relay everything that Hushai tells them to David. In 15:37 Hushai returns to the city as soon as Absalom returns. In 15:32 there is an apparent implication that David's prayers to God are to be answered by means of Hushai; after all, Hushai appears to David at the summit where God

58 Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 274.

59 Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 338.

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is worshipped.[60] However, this implication is only apparent, given that typically in the SN David's prayers are not answered (2 Sam. 12:16–22). Indeed, God has promised to punish David rather than to answer his prayers.

Thereby, the idea that this passage is an exposition of the interface of divine favour and self-help must be debated further. Von Rad argues that the Davidic narratives are an example of double causation, whereby, political realism is combined with God's plan.[61] This is a popular interpretation. However, it is questionable since double causation requires that the action of each party would cause the outcome, irrespective of the action of the other party. This is not the case in this narrative if it is assumed that Hushai's appearance was providential. In other words, David could not have achieved the outcome without God's intervention. An alternative interpretation involves partial causation. In instances of partial causation, the action of each party is necessary but neither is sufficient. However, this account diminishes God's power since God acting alone cannot achieve the outcome. This conundrum involving David, Hushai and God cannot be resolved at this point in the narrative. However, I return to this issue in the next chapter.

6.1.16 *Summary of 2 Samuel 15:1–37*

In 15:1 Absalom is depicted with a chariot, horses, and running men. This retinue implies that Absalom intends to challenge the throne, and may also be interpreted within God's warning about kings in 1 Samuel 8:11, suggesting an insinuation. The insinuation in 15:1 is followed by pretended error or ignorance in 15:2–3. In this instance, Absalom remarks that there is nobody to hear the claims of the people of Israel, even though this is the king's role. This gives rise to the insinuation, that Absalom thinks that he would be a better judge and therefore a better king than David. The criticism in this regard points in two different directions. David is implicitly criticized as he paves the way for Absalom's revolt. Absalom is criticized for manipulating the situation.

15:4–6 present the insinuation that Absalom, like David is more concerned with garnering political power rather than dedicating himself to faith in Yahweh's laws. Thereby, Absalom is similarly criticised for (potentially) being an opportunistic king. In 15:7–9 the irony is the pretended defence of the victim and an insinuation. In the first case, Absalom tricks David into allowing him to make a vow in Hebron. In the second case, the insinuation develops with

60 Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 193.

61 Gerhard von Rad, "The Beginnings of History Writing in Ancient Israel," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955).

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an understanding of David's history with Hebron, and of Absalom's conviction that he is in God's favour. 15:10 is a case of a misrepresentation as Absalom gets others to declare him to be king, despite the fact that David is the king. This verse points to Absalom's deceptiveness, and his foolishness.

Absalom's deceptiveness along with David's obliviousness is further highlighted in 15:11 which is an example of the sub-category of verbal irony, pretended error or ignorance. The ironist implies that the two hundred guests who accompany Absalom to Hebron (where Absalom seeks to mount his challenge against David), do so with full knowledge of what they are doing. In 15:12 there is an insinuation that Absalom is sending for a war counsellor. Ahithophel's connection to Bathsheba reminds the reader of David's transgressions. Ahithophel's current position emphasizes Absalom's deceitfulness. Together, there is a suggestion that both 'kings' are not in Israel's best interests. David cannot administer justice adequately, and Absalom is delusional. However, Israel wanted a king despite God's protestations.[62]

15:13–17 is a case of low burlesque, where David is spoken of as being a low character. The irony criticizes the poor decisions that he makes. 15:18 is an example of parody which reflects on David's time fighting with the Philistines. This section also hints at the idea of David's past catching up with him. There are allusions to the sword, which bring to mind David's transgressions, and his punishment. It may also be suggested that David is in some regards the instigator of part of his punishment, as he fails to administer justice correctly even after Nathan's castigation, which in turn produces the antagonism in Absalom which was predicted by God.

15:19–20 are an example of the sub-category of impersonal irony, the rhetorical question. David appears to be generous to Ittai, however, David uses double-speak to protect his position. 15:21 includes an overstatement which highlights the politicking which had become a staple of David's communication. 15:21–22 is an example of overstatement. 15:23 uses irony displayed to emphasize David's new status in exile.

15:24–29 is an example of a rhetorical question. In this case David's newfound situation in exile and Absalom's growth in popularity in Jerusalem are

62 At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that the Israelites are the real losers in this story as they find themselves caught in the middle of a king who does not administer justice and a prince who is angry, vengeful and delusional. The pejorative criticism of the ironist is that the Israelites are not receiving good governance. Yet, it was the Israelites who wanted a king despite Yahweh's warnings (1 Sam. 8:11–18). Thereby, in a broader sense the Israelites may be considered to be the victims of the irony, as they were confidently unaware of the consequences of their decision to have a king, despite being warned in detail of the dangers.

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striking, as is David's decision to dismiss the ark. In 15:27–29 it appears that David is cynical about traditions as a rhetorical question emphasizes the incongruity of David sending the ark back in the hope that the priests attending to it will become his spies. In this regard the ark is used as a cover-story. In 15:30 there is no evidence of irony, however, the mourning in the verse alludes to David's major transgressions.

15:31 confirms the irony in 15:25–26; in 15:31 David speaks of trust in God's decision, yet, organizes a spy system. This section is followed by 15:32–37. However, 15: 32–37 is somewhat inconclusive in relation to findings of irony.

6.2 2 Samuel 16:1–23

6.2.1 *2 Samuel 16:1*

At the lower level of the narrative Ziba is bringing supplies to David and doing so—we know from background knowledge—in the context of David fleeing from Absalom. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is an incongruity in this setting. Here we need to rely on additional background knowledge of the characters. It is not necessarily incongruous in itself that a king is fleeing from an uprising nor is it incongruous that a fleeing king is met by a servant who brings supplies. Yet, it is incongruous for a father to be fleeing from his own son. It is doubly incongruous for a father who has been told that he is God's chosen king (2 Sam. 12:7) to be fleeing from his son who also believes God to be on his side (2 Sam. 15:8). Furthermore, it is incongruous that David is met with supplies by Ziba in particular. For Ziba was previously the servant of Saul (2 Sam. 9:2) whom David usurped (2 Sam. 5:2–3).

The unknowing innocence in the narrative arises from the ironist's dissimulation. In 16:1 there is a seemingly innocuous encounter between David and Ziba at the lower level. However, in the context of our background knowledge—that David is fleeing from Absalom when he meets Ziba the former servant of Saul—there is a far from innocuous implication at the upper level. At the upper level the tenuous nature of the monarchy, the dilemma of chosen-ness, and David's decline are all highlighted.

The irony is not immediately obvious, and is therefore a covert grade of verbal irony. Moreover, the verbal irony is emphasised by the unusual use of language and in particular in the use of an unsuitable metaphor. In this case the metaphor is מהראשׁ.[63] Polzin suggests that references to ראשׁ[64] are both

63 "from the head" "from the top".

64 "head".

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symbolic and ironic. The symbolism concerns the connection between a head and a political leader. According to Polzin the irony is that David is not the 'head' of Israel at this stage, as he is fleeing from Jerusalem.[65] This interpretation is in keeping with the present analysis in terms of verbal irony. The significance of מהראש also arises from our knowledge that David has now made his way into Saulide territory.[66] This places David into the area of the king he usurped, and further highlights the instability of the monarchy in general.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of irony is irony displayed. In this sub-category of impersonal irony the irony emerges from the events which expose the object of ironic attack.[67] The close confrontation of incompatibles which is necessary for irony displayed can be observed in the King of Israel fleeing from his son, who also believes he is the King of Israel, and encountering the servant of the King of Israel, whom David usurped. The content of irony, as mentioned, is the instability in the institution of the monarchy.

6.2.2 *2 Samuel 16:2*

At the lower level of 16:2 there is David's question to Ziba: מה־אלה לך.[68] This question is asked by David in the context of Ziba having offered supplies to David in 16:1. So at the lower level of 16.2 David is asking Ziba for information that they both know David already has. After all, it is obvious that Ziba is offering supplies of food, wine etc. At the upper level of the narrative the question asked by David, the King, has a political implication the content of which is not entirely clear. Why is Ziba providing these supplies? Why is Ziba doing David this favour? Is it in fact a favour? Are there strings attached? So, it is a rhetorical question with political implications, albeit unclear ones. I note that the supplies are not for Ziba to give,[69] and it can be assumed that David wants to know who is behind the gift. In short, the knowledge of this relationship strengthens the assumption that David's question was political in nature. The opposition

65 Polzin suggests that the symbol of the head is central in the story of David's flight from Jerusalem. David and his followers cover their heads as they leaves Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:30), Hushai puts dirt on his head (2 Sam. 15:32), and Hushai and Ziba are met near the head of the mountain (2 Sam. 15:32, 16:1). Polzin also argues that the focus on an elevated landscape supports the head motif. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History*, 150.

66 Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 514.

67 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 82.

68 Author's translation, "what are these for?"

69 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 262.

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in the narrative arises from the difference between what David says and what David means.

At the lower level Ziba takes the question in its literal sense and, thereby, either chooses to ignore its implications or is blissfully unaware of them. Ziba's innocence, whether it be real or feigned, is emphasized in the comedy of Ziba's exaggerated response to David's question. Ziba's response outlines in detail that the donkeys are to be ridden, the food is to be eaten, and the wine is to be drunk. The question now arises as to whether Ziba's response is either feigned or merely naive. For Ziba may have understood the implication behind David's question and, therefore, responded as he did to avoid explicitly stating that his intention was to gain favour with the king. If this is the case then Ziba far from being naïve is a crafty operator. The proposition that Ziba is a crafty operator is supported by 16:4 in which we learn that David grants Ziba another man's estate.

The irony in this verse emerges in the context of our background knowledge taken in conjunction with the outcome of this interaction between David and Ziba. For, as discussed below, David is about to be tricked by Ziba into granting to Ziba, the estate of Ziba's master, Mephiboseth. Accordingly, the formerly celebrated and supposedly astute King David is about to be conned by a mere servant. Moreover, David had formerly transferred the servant Ziba from Saul, the king who David usurped, to Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:9–10). If David had not done so, Ziba would not have been in a position to trick David into transferring Mephibosheth's estate to Ziba. This is an instance of verbal irony. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent.

6.2.3 *2 Samuel 16:3*

At the lower level of 16:3 David asks Ziba where his master is. At the upper level, the ironist implies that David's real interest is in the loyalty of Mephibosheth. Therefore, this is a rhetorical question and the opposition between the upper and lower levels consists of the incongruity between an explicit question about geographical location and an implicit one about political affiliation.

At the lower level of 16:3 Ziba replies to David that his master is in Jerusalem declaring that Jerusalem will be returned to the House of Saul. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Ziba's interest is in winning David's favour since Ziba not only tells David the location of his master but also provides intelligence about his master's political loyalties. This indicates that Ziba, far from being naïve is a crafty operator who is well aware of the intention behind David's rhetorical question. This view is confirmed by later events, notably, when David gives Mephibosheth's estate to Ziba.

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The view that this dialogue is ironic political discourse is indicated by the language in the narrative, and in particular in the pointed use of the word מלך. In 16:2 the 'king' speaks to Ziba, in 16:3 the king speaks and it is written that Ziba answers to the 'king.' This linguistic usage is distinct from the preceding verses where the king is referred to primarily as David (2 Sam. 15:32–16:1). If this is indeed irony then it is verbal irony in the impersonal mode since the ironist is not a character in the narrative. The sub-category is the rhetorical question.

6.2.4 *2 Samuel 16:4*

At the lower level of 16:4 David gives Ziba Mephibosheth's estate, and Ziba does obeisance to David. At the upper level the ironist implies that the reason David is giving Mephibosheth's estate to Ziba is that Ziba informed David of Mephibosheth's betrayal of David—the latter being a matter of our background knowledge. Nevertheless, David's act of giving of the estate to Ziba is surprising since David does not adjudicate the case with witnesses, as he should. It is even more surprising given David's history with Mephibosheth. Previously, David had given everything that belonged to Saul to Mephibosheth, ostensibly, in order to pay חסד to Jonathan (2 Sam. 9:7), Mephibosheth's father. Note, I otherwise argue that David's act of '*hesed*' to Mephibosheth is in fact a self-serving political move. In this verse, it would appear that Mephibosheth is exploited by the king and by Ziba, the servant the king appointed to look after Mephibosheth in order to honour David's covenant with Jonathan.

Alter observes that it is unlikely that Mephibosheth could have come to David himself, as he was crippled in both of his feet and this disability was known to David.[70] This gives Ziba an opportunity to act on his own behalf. Stuart Lasine argues that David acts in haste, and suggests that it was likely that Ziba was lying.[71] Fokkelman also remarks that Ziba's statement is false and a betrayal of Mephibosheth.[72] Auld claims that Ziba is rewarded for lying.[73] Mauchline suggests that David is a fool for believing Ziba.[74]

Therefore, it is likely that Ziba is lying. This is supported by future events, specifically, in 2 Samuel 19–26 where Mephibosheth says that Ziba deceived him. Moreover, even if Ziba was not lying and Mephibosheth was disloyal to

70 Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 291.

71 For a comprehensive discussion on this topic see, Stuart Lasine, "Judicial Narratives and the Ethics of Reading: The Reader as Judge of the Dispute Between Mephibosheth and Ziba," *Hebrew Studies*, 30 (1989), 49–69.

72 Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 195.

73 Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 514.

74 Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 275.

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David, it can still be argued that David did not give Mephibosheth a fair trial as he should have. However, it is more credible that Ziba was lying to David in order to find favour with the king. This whole episode is yet another example of David being easily deceived and making foolish judgements. As with the other examples, this is an instance of the sub-category of impersonal irony, pretended defence of the victim. At first blush David is the unfortunate victim of Ziba's deception. However, the ironist implies that he ought not to have been deceived. The upshot is that David is the object of ironic attack.

6.2.5 *2 Samuel 16:5–6*

At the lower level of 16:5 Shimei, a supporter of Saul, curses David at the location known as בחורים that can be translated to mean 'chosen.'[75] At the lower level of 16:6 Shimei throws stones at David and his army. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David, the "chosen" king, is an exile being cursed and that David is not the heroic king that he is otherwise portrayed to be. The opposition between the levels arises from the incongruity between David being a cursed exiled king and David being the chosen king. A further incongruity is as follows. On the one hand, David was Saul's and Israel's champion because he killed the Philistine warrior Goliath with a single stone (1 Sam. 17:49). On the other hand, David, is now fleeing Israel in the company of mercenaries (who went with David to fight with the Philistines (1 Sam. 27:1–3, 2 Sam. 15:18)[76]) while a single Saulide pelts them all with stones. David is the object of the ironic attack, and possibly also the unknowing victim of the irony.

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. The ironic content is communicated in large part by our background knowledge but also to some extent by the language used. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony. The dominant sub-category is parody. The episode being parodied is David's encounter with Goliath (1 Sam. 17).

The parody begins in 16:5 with the curse linking this story with the story of David and Goliath. Like Goliath's curse, Shimei's curse is by-and-large ineffective, however, the parallel of the curses brings forth the parody. In 1 Samuel 17:43 it is a Philistine who curses David—David being Saul's champion. In 16:5, a Saulide curses David—David being the 'leader of Philistines', at least in the sense that David's army comprises soldiers who previously fought with David on behalf of the Philistines.

In the story of David and Goliath David was portrayed as a hero when he hurled a single, well-aimed stone at the forehead of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:49).

75 Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 196.

76 See commentary for 2 Sam 15:18.

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In 16:6, David is the object of ironic attack since him and his entire army are pelted with stones by a lone 'heroic' individual.[77] This parody of David can be understood in two different ways: (1) that David was never heroic, and that earlier accounts of David's heroics are inaccurate, or (2) that David was once heroic but has ceased to be so.

6.2.6 *2 Samuel 16:7–8*

At the lower level of 16:7–8 Shimei[78] shouts at David that he is a murderer who is responsible for murder in the House of Saul and for usurping the throne. Shimei shouts that this is why the Lord has given his kingdom into the hands of Absalom. Contrary to what Shimei claims, the narrative presents the taking of Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah as the reason for David's predicament (2 Sam. 12:10–11). Therefore, there is an element of Shimei's curse which is incorrect. However, consistent with Shimei's curse, albeit contrary to the legend of David's rise (1 Sam. 31:4–6; 2 Sam. 3:30–32; 4:8), it could still be the case that David usurped Saul's throne and was implicated in the murders of members of the House of Saul. The opposition in this section is the difference between what is said and what is implied. At the lower level Shimei says that David is being punished for his part in the Saulide's deaths, yet it is known that David is being punished for his part in Uriah's death. At the upper level, it is implied that David was implicated in the Saulide deaths, and that he was not punished for his part in these deaths. Indeed, he is explicitly and strenuously defended against such an accusation (1 Sam. 31:4–6; 2 Sam 3:30–32; 4:8).

Moreover, as we have seen above, the ironist has been utilising Shimei to parody the legend of David's rise. Arguably, therefore, the ironist is implying that Shimei is correct in claiming that David usurped Saul's throne, notwithstanding the reader's initial contrary impression. So, the verse is an instance of innuendo and David is the object of ironic attack. The verbal irony is covert since it is not immediately apparent, indeed it could well be contested.

77 Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 196.

78 The confusion over Shimei's character can be observed by contrasting Brueggemann and Simpson. Brueggemann suggests that Shimei is representative of the older order who were strict adherents of retributive justice, and is contrasted with David who stands for a newer relationship with God. (Walter Brueggemann, "On Coping with Curse: A Study of 2 Sam 16:5–14," *CBQ* 36, no. 2 (1974), 175–192). Simpson, on the other hand, argues that Shimei stands for a new group of people who were openly opposed to the wrong-doing of the kings, and were compelled to speak out against abuses of the Torah. From this perspective Shimei can be interpreted as being prophet-like, which suggests that the narrative is critical of David. Simpson, "Paradigm Shift Happens: Intertextuality and a Reading of 2 Samuel 16:5–14," 68–69.

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The verbal irony is heavily reliant on background knowledge and the mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony.

The claim that David may have been involved in the murders in the House of Saul is supported by the untrustworthiness of David's character, and has been noted by a number of different scholars. Alter alludes to it when he writes:

> The blood that, according to the narrative itself, David has on his hands, is that of Uriah the Hittite, and the fighting men of Israel who perished at Rabbath Ammon with Uriah. But the Benjaminite Shimei clearly believes what David himself, and the narrative with him, has taken pains to refute—that the blood of the house of Saul is on David's hands: Abner, Ish-bosheth, and perhaps even Saul and Jonathan (for David was collaborating with the Philistine Achish when they fell at Gilboa). Hence the phrase Shimei hurls at David in his next sentence, "all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you became king," suggesting a conjunction of murder and usurpation.[79]

Campbell is more forthright when he argues that this section highlights David's ruthless ambition which has caught up with him.[80]

However, whether or not David is responsible for the killing of the Saulides, it still stands that Shimei is unaware that David is responsible for Uriah's death, and that Uriah's death, in as much as it is the reason for God's punishment of David, is partly responsible for Absalom's revolt (2 Sam. 12:10–11). Shimei's ignorance of the Uriah event, and his confident, but incorrect (albeit unknowingly consistent) remark make him an unknowing victim of the verbal irony.

6.2.7 *2 Samuel 16:9*

At the lower level of 16:9 Abishai asks why Shimei should be allowed to curse David. This is obviously a rhetorical question since it is well-known that it is a crime to curse the king and, therefore, subject to severe punishment. This confirms that his question was purely rhetorical. Moreover, the implication of this question is that he actually has in mind to kill Shimei. Therefore, at the lower level Abishai is implying that Shimei should not be allowed to curse the king. At the upper level, Abishai implies that he should be allowed to kill Shimei. In respect of the rhetorical question, the opposition in the levels is between Abishai saying one thing, while he means another thing.

79 Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 292.
80 Campbell, *2 Samuel*, 150.

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David is the object of ironic attack since as the king he cannot allow someone to curse him with impunity. Yet it appears only Abishai and not David is aware of this. The grade of the verbal irony is overt, as it is immediately apparent. This assumption is supported by Abishai's reference to Shimei as a dead dog, and by his follow-up statement:

אעברה־נא ואסירה את־ראשׁו

(Please let me go over and take off his head!)[81]

Furthermore, Abishai's remark is in keeping with the laws. In Exod 22:28 it states:

אלהים לא תקלל ונשׂיא בעמך לא תאר

(You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people).[82]

Not only is this law a prohibition against cursing a king, but the strength of the commandment may be assessed in its connection with the prohibition not to revile Yahweh. This leads Simpson to suggest that Abishai is not acting recklessly, but is rather sticking to the Torah tradition and aligning himself with God.[83] Thereby, the criticism emerges that David has not acted according to the laws. This strengthens the above criticism that he was not acting with appropriate kingly authority.

6.2.8 *2 Samuel 16:10*

At the lower level of 16:10a David responds to Abishai's proposal to kill Shimei. David asks: "What have I to do with you, sons of Zeruiah". I note that Joab, Asahel and Abishai himself are the sons of Zeruiah. In 16:10b David suggests to Abishai that it is possible that Shimei is cursing him because the Lord has told him to do so. If so, David now asks who should challenge Shimei. Both of these questions are rhetorical. At the upper level of 16:10a the ironist implies that although David is asking what he should do with the sons of Zeruiah, the implicit message is that David would like to distance himself from the violence of the sons of Zeruiah; or, at least, he would like to do so in public. This implication is strengthened by David's apparently placatory question in relation to

81 Translation from NKJ.

82 Translation from NKJ.

83 Simpson, "Paradigm Shift Happens: Intertextuality and a Reading of 2 Samuel 16:5–14," 62 & 67.

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Shimei's cursing of him. I note that there are laws which prohibit people from cursing the king (Exod. 22:28). Therefore, not only is it entirely unlikely that God has caused Shimei to curse David, but David would need very good evidence for making this claim. On the other hand, David's knowledge of his own transgressions might provide him with a justification for thinking that the Lord did in fact tell Shimei to curse him.

The opposition in the narrative emerges in the incompatibility between what David says and with what David means. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apprehended. The ironic content is conveyed by the use of the rhetorical questions together with our background knowledge. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category rhetorical question.

The first rhetorical question that David uses to respond to Abishai is as follows:

> מה־לי ולכם בני צריה
>
> (What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?)[84]

In asking this question David appears to distance himself from the sons of Zeruiah, who, in the past have been described by David as being difficult (2 Sam. 3:39). This has led scholars to look favourably upon David, as it appears that he is not as bloodthirsty as the sons of Zeruiah,[85] or that he is calm and in control.[86] However, this interpretation ignores David's propensity for violence and retaliation when it suits him.

Moreover, it also ignores the fact that the sons of Zeruiah are part of David's trusted army. It may even be argued that the violence that David deplored in the case of Abner's death by the hand of Joab furthered David's interest (2 Sam. 3:25) since Abner was Saul's cousin and commander in chief of Saul's army (1 Sam. 14:50, 20:25). In some respects David's response to Abishai goes towards confirming this. For example, David says in 16:10:

> כי (כה) יקלל וכי (כי) יהוה אמר לו קלל את־דוד ומי יאמר מדוע עשׂיתה כן
>
> (If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, "Curse David", who then shall say, "Why have you done so?")[87]

84 Translation RSV.

85 Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 276.

86 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 263.

87 Translation RSV.

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David's response to the cursing is revealing. Anderson argues that David's reply may go towards implicating him in the Saulide murders.[88] As we saw above, David is seeking to distance himself from Abishai's violent disposition and David is being uncharacteristically, indeed culpably, placatory in respect of Shimei's cursing of him. This is understandable if David knows that Shimei's accusation is correct.

Moreover, this act of distancing himself from his crimes, presumably in order to avoid bloodguilt, is but one instance of a pattern in David's behaviour. Consider the death of Uriah (2 Sam. 12:9). This murder was not a direct killing by David, but an execution which was carried out on David's orders by another one of Zeruiah's sons, namely, Joab (2 Sam. 11:14–15). It may then be argued that it was always possible for David to keep himself free from the guilt of bloodshed, as he surrounded himself with people who were happy to take this on for him.[89]

6.2.9 *2 Samuel 16:11–12*

These verses do not appear to be ironic. However, a commentary is still in order. In 16:11–12 David tells Abishai to leave Shimei alone and offers the following explanation. David's own son Absalom seeks David's life. Therefore, it is not surprising that Shimei, a Benjamite and a Saulide, seeks David's life. Moreover, David says that the Lord has bidden Shimei to curse David (16:11). David also suggests that the Lord will look upon David's distress, on account of the curse, and repay David with good. This speech of David seems to implicate him in the murders of members of the House of Saul and the usurping of Saul's throne. After all, David says Shimei has reason to want to curse him and is doing so at the bidding of God.

In relation to 16:5–14, Brueggemann suggests that David's faith revolutionises the understanding of God's grace. Brueggemann argues that David knows that he has done wrong and that David expects to be punished for what he has done, however, he hopes for God's mercy. Thereby, David attributes a freedom to God. This freedom to act Brueggemann considers to be evidence of God's grace.[90] However, Brueggemann's impression of David can be countered. As

88 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 206–207.

89 Abishai encourages David to let him kill Saul in 1 Sam. 26:8, as he believes that God has given Saul to David to kill. Yet, David stops him, as David does not want to take on the guilt of killing Saul, and would prefer to see Saul die by God's hands by another method; possibly at the hands of another warrior in battle (1 Sam. 26:9–10). David is saved from taking on the blood guilt of Nabal in the previous chapter (1 Sam. 25:33–38). These events show David to abrogate his responsibility.

90 Brueggemann, "On Coping with Curses: A Study of 2 Sam 16:5–14," 181.

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we have seen, there is reason to think that David was involved in the deaths of the Saulides to a greater extent than the story of David's rise portrays. It also must be pointed out that David is ultimately 'unkind' to Shimei in 1 Kings 2:8–9 when he orders his execution on account of this cursing of David.

6.2.10 *2 Samuel 16:13–14*

The parody of David (as the heroic warrior) in the story of Shimei is continued in these verses. So, the sub-category of verbal irony, parody, is applicable here.

At the lower level of 16:13–14 David and his men march on as Shimei proceeds on the hillside opposite them throwing stones and flinging dust at them and cursing David. In 16:14 David and his men arrive at their destination tired. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David and his men are tired in large part because of their treatment at the hands of Shimei.

6.2.11 *2 Samuel 16:15–16*

At the lower level of 16:15 Absalom and all the Israelites, including Ahithophel, come to Jerusalem. In 16:16 Hushai comes to Absalom and repeats, יחי המלך יחי המלך. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Hushai remains loyal to David (2 Sam. 15:32–37) and is referring to David rather than Absalom in saying, "Long live the king". The opposition in the narrative is between what Hushai says and what Hushai means.[91] It can be inferred that Hushai intends for Absalom to believe that he is speaking about Absalom, when it can reasonably be assumed he is referring to David. So, Absalom is the object of ironic attack. If Absalom believes that Hushai is referring to him, then perhaps he is also the unknowing victim of irony. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it needs to be uncovered by way of background information. For instance, 2 Samuel 15:37 informs the reader that Hushai is David's friend, which is repeated in verse 16:16 where it is written:

ויהי כאשר־בא הושי הארכי רעה דוד

(And so it was, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came …)[92]

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is pretended agreement with the victim, since Hushai pretends to be on Absalom's side, whilst the implication is that he is not.

91 Anderson has suggested that this verse is an elliptic oath, whereby, Hushai puts himself under Absalom's control, but that it can be reasonably assumed that Hushai is thinking of David as he makes the statement (Anderson, *WBC, Vol. n. 2 Samuel*, 213).

92 Translation from the NKJ.

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6.2.12 *2 Samuel 16:17*

At the lower level in 16:17 Absalom asks Hushai if this is the loyalty he shows to his friend (namely, David), and asks him also why he did not go with his friend. At the upper level Absalom is implying that Hushai's *friend* is David and is, therefore, also implying that Hushai is still loyal to David. So Hushai is the object of ironic attack. Moreover, we can conclude from this that Absalom was not the unknowing victim of irony above (when Hushai was saying "Long live the king"). Further these questions are rhetorical questions and so the opposition in the narrative is between what Absalom says and what he means. The implied criticism of Hushai by Absalom in this verse is heightened by the pairing of the words רע and חסד,[93] and the repetition of the word רע in 16:17b. Thereby, it is unlikely that Hushai will mistake the implied meaning of Absalom's words. So, the irony is overt.

6.2.13 *2 Samuel 16:18–19*

At the lower level of 16:18 Hushai states to Absalom that he is loyal to the person who Yahweh and the Israelites have chosen. In 16:19 Hushai asks two questions: (1) Who should I serve? and; (2) Should it not be his son? In 16:19 Hushai says that he should serve Absalom just as he has served David. It can be assumed that Absalom, if he is the unknowing victim of the irony, would imagine that Hushai would be speaking of him when he talks of the person that Yahweh and the Israelites have chosen. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies, indeed insinuates, that Hushai is still loyal to David and, therefore, that this statement does not refer to Absalom. So, the opposition in the narrative is between what Hushai says and what he means.

The grade of verbal irony is covert and it relies on background knowledge and the language used, specifically, ambiguous words. As far as the background knowledge is concerned, the narrative does not express Absalom's view (presumably) that Yahweh was on Absalom's side. Instead, there is evidence that Absalom has misinterpreted God's role, or the lack of God's hand, in Absalom's situation (2 Sam. 15:8). Furthermore, instead of there being any evidence that the people chose Absalom, there is only evidence that Absalom "stole their hearts" (2 Sam. 15:6). David is still the one that Yahweh and the people of Israel chose. This supports the proposition that Hushai is referring to David when he says that he is loyal to the person that Yahweh and the people of Israel have chosen.

In the above verses there are two rhetorical questions asked by Hushai and there is an insinuation arising from Hushai's statement that he is loyal to the

93 "friend" and "faithful love".

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person that Yahweh and the people of Israel have chosen. We have discussed the insinuation. The rhetorical questions are found in 16:19:

והשׁנית למי אני אעבד הלוא לפני בנו
(And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son?)[94]

The opposition in this verse is between what Hushai says and what Hushai means. The question 'Who should I serve?' is not an inquiry. Instead, Hushai knows who he serves, namely, David. The question, 'Should it not be his son?' taken as a rhetorical question with ironic content, implied that Hushai should not serve David's son.

6.2.14 *2 Samuel 16:20–23*

At the lower level of 16:20–23 Absalom asks Ahithophel for his counsel. Ahithophel tells Absalom to go to David's concubines. Absalom takes David's concubines on the roof of the palace in full view of all of Israel. The narrator says that Ahithophel's counsel was as though he had consulted the word of God. At the upper level the ironist implies that Ahithophel's counsel was not like the word of God. The opposition in the narrative is between what is said and what is meant. Ahithophel is said to be giving advice as if he had consulted the word of God, however, Ahithophel's advice is contrary to God's laws. In effect, Ahithophel advises Absalom to commit treason, and sexual crimes. Ironically, the content of Ahithophel's counsel is contrary to God's laws, notwithstanding that he is said to have provided advice as if he had consulted the word of God.

However, there is a second irony. Ironically, although Ahithophel's advice is against God's laws it is actually in keeping with God's promised punishment of David (12:11). Both ironies are covert and depend on background knowledge of the text.

In the case of the first irony, Ahithophel's advice is sound in as much as taking the king's concubines is a challenge to the throne.[95] Thereby, this act would not only sever the relationship that Absalom had with his father, but it would also convince Israel that there is no chance of a further reconciliation between Absalom and David. Yet, as mentioned, contrary to God's laws Ahithophel advises Absalom to commit treason, adultery and rape.[96]

94 Translation from RSV.

95 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 384.

96 Michael Avioz, "Divine Intervention and Human Error in the Absalom Narrative," *JSOT 37* no. 3 (2013), 339–347, 344.

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The irony is impersonal as the ironist is not a character in the story, and the sub-category is inappropriate or irrelevant praise. Ahithophel's advice was *not* as if he had consulted the word of God. For it was contrary to God's laws.

Let me now consider the second irony. In 2 Samuel 12:11–12, God states:

> כה אמר יהוה הנני מקים עליך רעה מביתך ולקחתי את־נשׁיך לעיניך ונתתי לרעיך ושׁכב עם־נשׁיך
> יניעל שׁמשׁה דגנו לארשׁי־לכ דגנ הזה רבדה־תא השׁעא ינאו רתסב תישׁע התא יכ תאזה שׁמשׁה
>
> (Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun).[97]

This suggests that God had preordained Absalom's public raping of David's concubines; after all, this event is in essence a fulfilment of God's promised punishment of David. However, there is a hitch. Absalom is breaking a law by having sexual intercourse with his father's concubines and, more importantly, committing treason by challenging the throne of David. Moreover, Ahithophel is implicated as a co-conspirator. Ironically, therefore, if this punishment is wholly dependent on God, then apparently God is pleased to contravene God's own laws!

However, David had already abandoned the concubines (15:16) that Absalom rapes and, as previously argued, in doing so is the architect of his own punishment by God. Of course, God inflicts his punishment on David through the actions of Absalom. However, like David, Absalom is the author of his own actions, likewise, his co-conspirator, Ahithophel. So, David, Absalom and Ahithophel are all culpable for breaking God's laws and, presumably, therefore, cannot absolve themselves by ascribing responsibility for their actions to God.

6.2.15 *Summary of 2 Samuel 16:1–23*

In 16:1 the sub-category of impersonal irony, irony displayed, points to instability in the monarchy. In 16:2 and 16:3 rhetorical questions highlight political manipulations. In 16:4 an example of pretended defence of the victim portrays David as a fool. In 16:5–6 David's lack of heroics emerges in the parody in the verse. In 16:7–8 there is an innuendo that David is ultimately responsible for a number of Saulide deaths. In 16:9 David's failure to act according to the laws

97 Translation from RSV.

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is implicitly criticized in a rhetorical question. 16:10 stresses by way of another rhetorical question David's inability to recognise and then administer the laws. There is no irony in 16:11–12. In 16:13–14 David's heroic image is parodied. In 16:16 the irony that portrays Absalom as a fool is pretended agreement with the victim. In 16:17 there is a rhetorical question and an insinuation that Hushai is not Absalom's friend. In 16:18–19, yet again, the confusion over the rightful monarchy emerges by way of rhetorical questions. In 16:20–23, the rhetorical feature, inappropriate or irrelevant praise, enables the implication that Ahithophel's advice is not like the word of God.

6.3 2 Samuel 17

6.3.1 *2 Samuel 17:1–4*

This section does not readily show forth irony, however, it is important to give a commentary as it aids the interpretation of irony in past and future sections.

Most scholars agree that the advice that Ahithophel gives to Absalom is good advice if he is to win the battle.[98] His advice to Absalom is that he, Ahithophel, gather an army of twelve thousand men and set out immediately while David and David's army are tired. Ahithophel predicts that David's army will panic and flee leaving David alone to be killed. An army of twelve thousand men would be a formidable force against David and his soldiers, especially if they were tired and unprepared for the confrontation. It is also good advice to restrict the casualties of war, as Ahithophel suggests (17:2). However, Ahithophel's advice that Absalom stay removed from the battle is problematic, given Israel's expectation of her kings (1 Sam. 8:20; 18:16; 2 Sam. 5:2–3). At this stage of the narrative this does not seem to be appreciated by Absalom and the elders of Israel for they say that they are pleased with Ahithophel's advice (17:4).[99]

In short, the advice that Ahithophel gives Absalom is not good advice, assuming Absalom is to remain with honour in the eyes of the people of Israel. However, it is good tactical advice in terms of overcoming David and his army. Of note, the 'good' advice which Ahithophel gives to Absalom is the same military tactic that David used in 2 Samuel 11:1. The problem of David failing to lead his army into battle has already been discussed in chapter 3 of this

98 Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 350; Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 279; Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 296; McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 381 et al.

99 However, it may be suggested that this affirmation cannot be entirely trusted as Absalom ultimately takes a different course of action (17:23–24).

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book. This includes the criticism of David in 2 Samuel 11:27–28 where in the final stages of the battle Joab tells David to join the war and to take Rabbah. Indeed, perhaps Ahithophel counselled David to take the action he took in 2 Samuel 11:1, given Ahithophel was David's counsellor at the time.[100]

6.3.2 *2 Samuel 17:5–7*

At the lower level of the narrative Absalom calls Hushai (17:5), and tells him the plan that Ahithophel has put forth. Absalom then asks Hushai what he thinks of Ahithophel's plan (17:6). Hushai tells Absalom that Ahithophel's advice is not good advice (17:7). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist is aware that the advice that Ahithophel gives Absalom is tactically good advice, yet poor advice as far as the expectations of the Israelites are concerned. Therefore, if Hushai is to counter this advice (2 Sam. 15:34), he must give poor tactical military advice, and good advice regarding honourable fighting, in order to frustrate Ahithophel's plan.[101]

The opposition in the narrative is the incongruity between the need for Hushai to give Absalom good advice (i.e. to act honourably in the eyes of the Israelites (1 Sam. 8:20; 18:16; 2 Sam. 5:2–3)),[102] when Hushai's goal is to counteract Ahithophel's good advice (i.e. with respect to Ahithophel's military tactics). So ironically, Hushai must give good advice to *undermine* good advice. Furthermore, Ahithophel is an object of ironic attack since he is advising Absalom to act in a manner that the people of Israel will regard as *dishonourable*. Yet Hushai is also an object of ironic attack since he is advising Absalom to act in a manner that the people of Israel will regard as *honourable*. Both Ahithophel and Hushai are the unknowing victims of irony. For in both cases they are confidently unaware that their advice is ironic. Of note, the issue of David failing to lead his army into battle has been a major source of criticism

100 Despite my claim that there are no discernible instances of verbal irony in this section, there are other anomalies in this passage which suggest that all is not what it may seem. For instance, Alter suggests that the image of a single man being struck down whilst the army flees, ironically mirrors David's plan for Uriah (Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 296). Mauchline argues that it is unusual for a wise man to lead an army (Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 279). Auld observes that David is still spoken of as the king, despite the fact that Ahithophel is addressing Absalom, who clearly views himself as the king (Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 521).

101 The real boon for Hushai is that Absalom tells him Ahithophel's plan. With this knowledge, Hushai can pass on both possible scenarios to David, and David can plan accordingly.

102 A difficulty does arise in this interpretation given that Absalom is not the true king. However, the tide of popular opinion did change when David led the Israelites out to war (1 Sam. 18:5–7), and it may be assumed that this would be the correct course of action for Absalom to take in the present circumstances.

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of David throughout this narrative. Hence the importance of this issue in the above episode in 17:5–7.

The grade of verbal irony is covert and is conveyed with reference to the overall narrative context. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal as the ironist is not a character in the narrative, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is irony displayed, as the arrangement of the events brings forth the irony.[103]

6.3.3 *2 Samuel 17:8–13*

At the lower level of 17:8–13 Hushai explains his plan to Absalom. Hushai argues that David will not spend the evening with the soldiers (17:8), that David is hidden, and that fear could set into Absalom's army at the fall of their first troops (17:9). Hushai also reminds Absalom that David and his soldiers are fierce fighters (17:10). Hushai advises Absalom to go into battle himself with a much larger army, an army it will take some time to amass (17:11).

At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is not as heroic as he is otherwise portrayed by Hushai. The opposition in the narrative concerns the content of Hushai's overstated and outdated appraisal of David with his current situation as a corrupt and incompetent king who has been driven out of his kingdom. Of note, David and his army are spoken of in exaggerated terms.[104] Furthermore, the content of Hushai's message is overstated. Hushai creates an image of David as a warrior. This is in stark contrast to the image of David in chapter 11 and 12, when David does not go out to war until he is called to capture a city at the end of difficult fighting (2 Sam. 11:1, 12:27–28).

As far as the portrayal of David is concerned, a number of unusual words are used as similes to contrast David's past as a warrior with his present situation. For instance, the unusual word מר[105] (2 Sam. 17:8) is also used in 1 Samuel 22:2, where David becomes the captain over a group of fugitives. Similarly, the unusual word דב[106] (2 Sam. 17:8) is used in 1 Samuel 17:36, where David boasts that he has killed a lion and a bear, and that Goliath would meet the same fate. The unusual wording איש מלחמה[107] (1 Sam. 16:18) is also in 2 Samuel 17:8. Similarly,

103 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 82.

104 Throughout 17:8–13 a range of different rhetorical devices are used. Song-Mi Park notes the paronomasia of verbal roots and oppositions, and the heightened or exaggerated speech. Ronald Hyman notes (a) metaphor (even the valiant men with a lion's heart (17:10)); (b) simile (troops as numerous as the sand by the sea (17:11)) and (c) alliteration. All of these rhetorical devices point to irony in the passage.

105 "enraged" "bitter".

106 "bear".

107 "man of war".

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the mention of hiding (17:9) hints at David's battle with Saul (1 Sam. 26:1).[108] On this subject, Bar-Efrat writes, "Hushai may be referring associatively to the heroic period when David showed quite clearly that he had both courage and initiative and was able to prevail in difficult and highly dangerous situations."[109] By contrast Park is more cynical when he argues, "Hushai's rhetoric serves to evoke images of a different David of a bygone era—not the weary, lusty, old king who stays at home to seduce another man's wife, but the mighty and cunning warrior who wrestled the throne from Saul."[110] Either way, it is clear that Hushai's current somewhat glowing appraisal of David is overstated.

6.3.4 *2 Samuel 17:14–22*

At the lower level of 17:14–22, in general terms, Hushai's advice, rather than Ahithophel's advice, is taken by Absalom (17:14). In 17:14 Absalom and all of the men of Israel say that Hushai's advice is better than Ahithophel's advice. It is also written that Ahithophel's good advice was defeated by the Lord so that Absalom would be destroyed (17:14). Hushai relays the content of both Ahithophel's counsel and his own to David via the spies, Zadok and Abiathar (17:15–21), David acts on this information and leaves his vulnerable location immediately (17:22). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that the real boon for Hushai, and ultimately for David, was Absalom's foolishness in making Ahithophel's plan known to Hushai (17:6) who in turn informed David via the spy network. This undermines the prevailing view among commentators that God defeating the counsel of Ahithophel brought about Absalom's demise. This latter view relies on the background information in 5:31 where David says, "O Lord, I pray you, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." In 17:14 it would appear that God is answering David's prayers. However, as explained above, Absalom is the architect of his demise by virtue of his foolishness in informing Hushai of Ahithophel's counsel of war. More specifically, Ahithophel advises Absalom to immediately go and ambush David. However, an ambush relies on catching the enemy off-guard. But due to Absalom's foolishness in informing Hushai of this plan, David was forewarned and made his escape. Therefore, regardless of whether Absalom accepted Ahithophel's tactical military advice or not, Absalom was unable to act on it.

It might be argued that Absalom's assent to Hushai's plan in Hushai's presence was insincere. Verse 16:17, for example, strongly suggests that Absalom did

108 Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 297–298.

109 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 232.

110 Song-Mi Park, "The Frustration of Wisdom: Wisdom, Counsel, and Divine Will in 2 Samuel 17:1–23," *JBL* 128, no. 3 (2009), 453–467, 458–459.

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not trust Hushai. So, it is possible that Absalom said he would act on Hushai's plan in order to deceive Hushai. Hushai certainly does not take Absalom's assent to his plan as necessarily sincere. For Hushai informs David of Ahithophel's counsel as well as his own. Accordingly, Hushai provides for all possibilities, i.e. for the possibility that Absalom will act on Ahithophel's military plan, for the possibility that Absalom will act on Hushai's plan, and for the possibility that Absalom will act on a combination of the advice given to him by Ahithophel and Hushai.

Ironically, then, Absalom is the architect of his own demise and, as such, the object of ironic attack. He is also the unknowing victim of irony since he is confidently unaware of the threat he poses to himself. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode is impersonal. The sub-category is irony displayed as the irony is displayed in the sequence of events.

6.3.5 *2 Samuel 17:23*

There is no apparent irony in 17:23. Ahithophel sees that his advice has not been followed and travels to his home city, puts his affairs in order, and commits suicide. It has already been noted that the tactical military advice that Ahithophel gave to Absalom was the best advice for Absalom to succeed in battle, however, Ahithophel's advice to Absalom not to lead his army into battle was not good advice as far as the expectations that the Israelites had for their leaders is concerned. It must also be noted that Ahithophel's 'wise' advice was an act of high treason,[111] as he advised Absalom to implement a subversive plan to kill the true King of Israel.

Of note, it may be suggested that the narrative which has focused strongly on the rightful king to sit over Israel, may be alluding to Saul's suicide in this passage (1 Sam. 31:4).

6.3.6 *2 Samuel 17:24–29*

There is no apparent irony in the following verses. However, a brief commentary may be helpful to put the rest of the narrative in perspective.

In 17:24 it is reported that David has moved to Mahanaim while Absalom has settled in Gilead with all of the men of Israel. There Absalom gives to Amasa Joab's role as captain of the army (17:25). Meanwhile, Shobi, Machir, Barzillai bring supplies for David and his men. The supplies allow David and his men to restore their energy, and the break allows them to regroup. Therefore, it would appear that Ahithophel's tactical military advice was the correct advice to win

111 Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 230.

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the battle. Indeed, Ahithophel had warned Absalom that David and his army would be tired and weary. This is confirmed in verse 17:29:

העם רעב ועיף וצמא במדבר

(The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness).[112]

6.3.7 *Summary of 2 Samuel 17:1–28*

There is no apparent irony in 17:1–4. In 17:5–7 Hushai seeks to frustrate Ahithophel's advice, and in doing so gives Absalom advice which is poor tactical advice but good advice regarding honour in fighting. The type of irony in this section is irony displayed. In 17:8–13 Hushai gives Absalom his counsel. This advice ends up being poor tactical advice, and good advice if Absalom is going to lead his men out to war according to the expectations of Israel. The verbal irony in this section is pretended advice to the victim. In 17:14–22 a case of irony displayed illustrates that Absalom is a fool for letting Hushai know Ahithophel's counsel. There is no further discernible verbal irony in this chapter.

6.4 2 Samuel 18:1–18:33/19:1

6.4.1 *2 Samuel 18:1–2a*

At the lower level of 18:1–2a David organises his troops and appoints captains to lead thousands and captains to lead hundreds (18:1). In 18:2 it is reported that David divides his army so that it is under the joint control of Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David's decision to appoint Joab and Abishai as captains is a poor one. For in Exodus 18:21, and Deutereonomy 1:15, it is said that only honourable men should be given leadership positions. Yet ironically Joab and Abishai, who David appoints to lead the hundreds and thousands are men of questionable character. The opposition in this narrative arises from the incompatibility between the conception of wise and upstanding men leading others (Exod. 18:21, Deut. 1:15) and David's choice of Joab and Abishai to be his leaders (18:2). David is the object of ironic attack since he makes these appointments. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the ironic content is implied by the use of the language and our background knowledge of the narrative. In all three verses (18:1–2a, in Exod. 18:21 and Deut. 1:15–18) the same language is used. The words which are common to all three verses are:

112 Translation from the RSV.

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שׂרי אלפים ושׂרי מאות

(captains of thousands and captains of hundreds)[113]

Arguably, there is an allusion to the sage advice of Jethro (Exod. 18:21) and Moses (Deut. 1:15–18) and David's decisions are inconsistent with this advice. Indeed, at least two out of the three officers that David puts in charge of his army are known to be ruthless and reckless. Joab is complicit in Uriah's unlawful death (2 Sam. 11:16–17). Joab is also guilty of masking David's incompetence (2 Sam. 12:27–28). However, Joab's greatest failing in the narrative thus far is his decision to trick David into bringing Absalom back to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 14). This ruse paved the way for the success of Absalom's revolt.

Although not much is written about Abishai, it is implied that he is less than wise, honest, and God-fearing. McCarter writes, "The stories present him [Abishai] as heroic and fiercely loyal (cf. II Sam. 21:16–17) but rash and rather cold blooded in dealing with enemies, often requiring restraint (I Sam. 26:8–11; II Sam. 16:9–12, 19:21–22)."[114] Of all of the sons of Zeruiah, McCarter argues, "Here and elsewhere the sons of Zeruiah-prefer violent, swift action to reason and restraint."[115] Less is known of Ittai the Gittite. However, in 2 Samuel 15:19–22 it is implied that Ittai is opportunistic.

The mode of verbal irony in this verse is impersonal and the sub-category is insinuation, since it is implied that the leaders in David's army are corrupt.

6.4.2 *2 Samuel 18:2b–4*

At the lower level of 18:2b David tells his soldiers that he will march out with them. The men tell David that he must not march out with them as his life is too valuable (18:3).[116] In 18:4 David tells the soldiers that he will do as they requested. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David ought to lead them in battle since it is previously stated that Israel appointed David king because he leads his soldiers in battle (2 Sam. 5:2–3). Not unlike the story of the woman from Tekoa (2 Sam. 14:12–21), it would appear that David initially tried to do the right thing, yet is dissuaded from doing so, by the encouragement of subordinates.[117]

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113 Author's translation.

114 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 95.

115 Ibid., 97.

116 Fokkelman suggests that the soldiers' request for David to remain absent from the war provides "an ironic connection" with 2 Samuel 17:2 where Ahithophel wanted David to be separate from his men. Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 238.

117 This may also have been the case in 2 Samuel 11:1 where David does not go out to battle but remains in Jerusalem. The narrative informs the reader that Ahithophel was David's

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The incongruity here is between David's preparedness to fight honourably (18:2b) and the fact that he allows himself to be diverted from the honourable course of action by his men (18:3). So, ironically, David who is all too often inclined to do the wrong thing, is in this instance desirous of doing the right thing, but is persuaded by his subordinates to do the wrong thing. David is the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of irony.

The grade of verbal irony is covert and the ironic content is implied by the use of language and our background knowledge. As far as the language used in the narrative is concerned, Auld argues, "David's insistence that he join the battle … is triply underscored linguistically: the verb is doubled by use of the infinitive absolute; the independent pronoun is used to stress the subject; and even that is further emphasized with the added "also" (*gam*)."[118] This use of language highlights the incongruity mentioned above. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category is insinuation. There is an insinuation that David is not the warrior king he once used to be.

6.4.3 *2 Samuel 18:5–7*

At the lower level of the narrative David instructs his commanders to be gentle with Absalom, and all of Israel hear the command (18:5). The battle between the men of Israel and David's troops is fierce, and David's troops slaughter a great number of Absalom's army (18:6–7). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is unable to discharge his responsibilities when it involves his family. After all, Absalom is committing treason for which the punishment is death (1 Kgs. 2:25) and Absalom's treason is a threat to David's kingdom. Of note, Ahithophel's decision to hang himself (2 Sam. 17:23) was in keeping with this punishment.[119] Moreover, the ironist also implies that Absalom's revolt was fuelled in large part by David's inability to administer justice adequately. This implication relies on our background knowledge (2 Sam. 15:3). Further, the ironist implies that David is quite happy to put the lives of his own men at risk while attempting to spare that of his enemy. The incongruity in the narrative is between David's plea for the army to be gentle with Absalom and the implications with respect to Absalom's treason and David's own men just mentioned.

The inconsistency in David's judgments has been a strong theme throughout the narrative. In some cases his punishment is too severe (2 Sam. 12:5–6),

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counsellor (2 Sam. 15:12), so it is possible that Ahithophel would have given David similar advice to the advice that he gave to Absalom (2 Sam. 17:1–3). Ibid., 238.

118 Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 539.

119 Death by hanging is also the punishment for treason in Esther 2:23.

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and in other cases he does not administer justice at all (2 Sam. 13:21, 14:33). The leniency David shows is predominantly to his own family members (2 Sam. 13:21, 14:33). However, in this narrative the lives of David's soldiers are at risk (18:4) and, indeed, David's kingdom itself is at extreme risk, from the actions of his son, Absalom. Ironically, then, David is at his most lenient when the threat to his own men and his kingdom is at its most extreme.

David is the object of ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is irony displayed.

6.4.4 *2 Samuel 18:8–9*

At the lower level of these verses the forest is reported as being responsible for more victims than the sword (18:8). 18:9 describes how Absalom's head/hair became entangled in a tree whilst his mule rode out from underneath him, leaving him hanging in the tree. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom's over-zealous, self-righteous vigilante mission has come to an absurd, if fitting, end. The incongruity here is between the earlier portrayal of Absalom as the just avenger of his sister, Tamar, and the current portrayal of him as a pathetic, treasonous criminal who has come to the end of the line. This is symbolised by Absalom's hanging in the tree. This is significant, as treasonous kings were routinely hung on trees (Josh. 8:29; 10:26).

Absalom is the object of ironic attack. He is also the unknowing victim of irony as he is confidently unaware of the irony of the situation. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the ironic content is dependent on our background knowledge concerning the sequence of events that began with the rape of Tamar.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of irony is irony displayed. However, this instance of irony displayed is different to the previous examples of irony displayed discussed in this book. In respect of this species of irony displayed Muecke says: "The other way is to accept the situation or the victim's position but develop it according to the victim's premises until the absurdity of the conclusion confronts the plausibility of the beginning."[120] In our example, the irony displayed involves Absalom. The initial position is that of Absalom's hardened heart and his belief that vigilantism equates with justice. The absurdity develops as follows. Absalom is originally portrayed as a character who is over-zealous when it concerns justice, but whose vigilante style of justice turns him into a person who is entirely unjust, even more unjust than David. So, the greatest absurdity is that Absalom's behaviour is in some

120 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 82.

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cases more corrupt than David's, despite Absalom's apparent resentment towards David's unjust behaviour. The absurdity in Absalom's extreme and corrupt behaviour confronts the plausibility of his initial intention to avenge.

Ironically, Absalom's character and David's character eventually become somewhat similar. Moreover, again ironically, Absalom's vigilante behaviour which is initially fuelled in reaction to David's unlawful behaviour, ends up being far worse than David's behaviour. Absalom is confidently unaware of the irony of the situation.[121]

It might also be argued, that there is an allusion to the story of the woman of Tekoa in this verse. Notably, David swore an oath to the woman of Tekoa that he would ensure that not one hair from the head of her son would fall to the ground (2 Sam. 14:11). Absalom is analogous to the woman's son in the ruse of the woman of Tekoa. In the story of the woman of Tekoa, David promises to protect her son and in the current situation, David commands that Absalom be protected. In the story of the woman of Tekoa David's decision to save her son is foolish since it leads to the return of Absalom from exile. Likewise, David's decision to protect Absalom is foolish. For Absalom should have been killed since he was responsible for the unlawful murder of Amnon. By allowing him back to Jerusalem the inevitable was delayed, amidst much damage to the kingdom. So, the allusion to the woman of Tekoa highlights David's foolishness in protecting Absalom in the current situation.

In summation, neither Absalom nor David are obedient to the laws. The absurd outcome of Absalom's vigilante behaviour has been discussed, as has David's incompetence, specifically, his failure to administer the law adequately. Moreover, it is David's incompetence that has enabled Absalom's behaviour. The result of all this has been disastrous, as Israel is engaged in civil war.[122]

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121 A summary of Absalom's situation may be helpful to highlight the absurdity of the situation. In 2 Samuel 13:28 Absalom orders that Amnon is killed in what could be called vengeance because of the rape of his sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:32). Yet, Absalom acts out of anger (2 Sam. 13:32), and not according to good judgment, which means that Absalom's actions are not sanctioned by the law (Lev. 19:17). Absalom angrily demands that David give him justice in his own case (2 Sam. 14:22), notwithstanding that justice in his case requires that Absalom is killed. Absalom then tricks the Israelites into following him, because he tells them that there is nobody to administer justice in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:1–6). This is a manipulative comment. A further absurdity may be considered in the knowledge that Absalom appeared to believe that God was on his side (2 Sam. 15:8), however, the reader knows that Absalom is only returned to Jerusalem because David is tricked into returning him (2 Sam. 14:11–17).

122 Of note, the typical irony which is spoken of in this passage is the fact that Absalom was riding a mule. Auld suggests that there is irony in the contrast of Absalom behind a horse and a chariot (2 Sam. 15:1) and Absalom riding a mule (2 Sam. 18:9). Auld argues that the

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6.4.5 *2 Samuel 18:10–11*

At the lower level of 18:11 is Joab's response to the man who announced to Joab that Absalom was hanging in a tree (18:10). Joab asks the man why he did not kill Absalom, and Joab tells the man that he would have rewarded him, had he done so (18:11). At the upper level of the narrative Joab is implying that the man should have killed Absalom. Since Joab's comment is not a strict request for information. Joab is instead asking a rhetorical question. In addition, Joab is implying that would still be prepared to pay the man if he kills Absalom. So, his statement about the past is also an offer with respect to the future. This view is supported by Fokkelman who argues that Joab's comment והנה ראית (And behold you saw)[123] (18:11) is a cutting response to the soldier's remark הנה ראיתי (Behold I saw)[124] (18:10); that 18:11c "… and why did you not strike him to the ground"[125] (ומדוע לא־הכיתו שׁם ארצה) is a reproach in the form of a rhetorical question; and that 18:11d is an inducement.[126]

The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what Joab says and what Joab means. Arguably, Joab is not asking the soldier why he did not kill Absalom because he is genuinely interested to know the man's motivation; instead Joab is taking the opportunity to induce the soldier to kill Absalom. The grade of verbal irony is overt in the case of the rhetorical question but is covert in the case of the inducement. The implied inducement is not immediately apparent and is dependent on the use of language as well as the context.

On the other hand, Baldwin suggests that Joab's question is sarcastic,[127] however, it is more appropriate to argue for a subtler irony in this instance, given that the rhetorical question is followed by an inducement. Since the inducement is to perform an act that is contrary to the king's command and is,

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mule is a lesser animal which was also used by the princes when they fled from Amnon's assassination (2 Sam. 13:29) (Auld, *I & II Samuel,* 541). However, in this period mules were the traditional transport of princes and kings (Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 304–305). Mules would have been a better choice for this battle as their dietary needs are easier to meet, and they are more surefooted than horses on uneven terrain. The terrain was known to be difficult as it is stated that the forest claimed more lives than the sword did (18:8). It might also be said that Auld's observation that the princes fled from Amnon's assassination on mules re-enforces the idea that mules were thought to be special animals fit for royalty. Thereby, it is unlikely that there is irony in the mention of the mule.

123 Author's translation.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Fokkelman, "King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)," 243.

127 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 270.

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therefore, unlawful, it is not merely an inducement but a bribe. The bribe is as follows:

ועלי לתת לך עשׂרה כסף וחגרה אחת
(And I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a belt.)[128]

That Joab is offering a bribe supports the irony in 18:1–2a concerning David's appointment of corrupt captains. For in Exodus 18:21 it is stated that Jethro chose men to lead hundreds and thousands who were trustworthy and hated bribes whereas David appointed Joab to lead over hundreds and thousands. The fact that Joab is offering a bribe makes him the object of ironic attack in this verse (18:11).

6.4.6 *2 Samuel 18:12–13*

At the lower level of 18:12–13 the soldier that Joab was speaking to tells Joab that he would never kill Absalom for the reason that David commanded the troops not to do so (18:12). The soldier also makes a point of telling Joab that it is his belief that if he had killed Absalom, Joab would not have protected him (18:13). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that the soldier would have killed Absalom and accepted Joab's bribe if he had believed that Joab would have protected him. This implication arises from the incompatibility between the following statements. Firstly, the soldier boldly tells Joab that he would not kill Absalom for the reason that it is the king's command that he not do so. The soldier even goes so far as to suggest that if he were to be given "a thousand pieces of silver" he would still refuse to disobey David's order (18:12). This remark is an overstatement as the soldier restates Joab's offer tenfold.[129] However, secondly, in the next sentence the soldier suggests that he would not kill Absalom because Joab would not protect him if he did (18:13).

The opposition in the narrative arises from the incompatibility with what the soldier says and what the soldier means. The grade of verbal irony in this instance is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. In 18:12 the soldier adamantly tells Absalom that he will not kill Absalom. However, the implication is that he would have killed Absalom if Joab could be trusted. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and as stated the sub-category of irony is overstatement. The object of ironic attack is the soldier and his deceitful character.

128 Author's translation.

129 Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 305.

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6.4.7 *2 Samuel 18:14–17*

At the lower level of 18:14 Joab strikes Absalom in the heart with three spears, and ten of Joab's armour-bearers strike Absalom and kill him (18:15). In 18:16 the troops come back from chasing the Israelites, and in 18:17 Absalom is buried while the Israelites flee the war and return home. At the upper level it is implied that Joab has committed an act of treason because he has not followed the king's orders and that he is partly responsible for Absalom's attempt to usurp the throne. In 18:5 it states that the king ordered Joab, Abishai, and Ittai to deal gently with Absalom. Thereby, ironically, Joab has followed the correct course of action by killing Absalom since this saves the kingdom, but he does so by way of an act of treason since he directly disobeyed the king's command. Moreover, Joab is complicit in Absalom's revolt since he engineered Absalom's return to Jerusalem. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode of verbal irony is impersonal. The sub-category is irony displayed. Joab is the object of ironic attack and is also he unknowing victim since he is confidently unaware of the irony of the situation.

Of note is an irony that emerges out of some features of the war fought between David and Absalom that resemble features in the content of Ahithophel's counsel to Absalom in 2 Samuel 17:1–3. Ahithophel suggests that Absalom should allow Ahithophel to go after David without Absalom (2 Sam. 17:3). Similarly, in 18:3 Joab and the army go to war without David. In 2 Samuel 17:2 Ahithophel predicts that David's army would be in a panic. It could be suggested that Absalom's army was in a panic (18:7–8). Ahithophel says that he will only kill the king (2 Sam. 17:3). Although a large number of Absalom's army die (18:7), the battle ceases after Absalom's death (18:16). Ahithophel predicts that all of the people will flee (2 Sam. 17:2). In 18:17 all of the people with Absalom flee. In the light of the above, we can now see that Absalom was defeated by the very advice which he decided not to follow, namely, the advice from Ahithophel that Absalom should not lead his men into battle. Moreover, the things that Ahithophel predicted would happen to David and his army (if Absalom followed Ahithophel's advice) actually happened to Absalom and his army. This is all very ironic. Indeed, since Absalom is the object of ironic attack by virtue of his foolishness, the category of irony is verbal irony. The irony is greatly strengthened by the following consideration. Presumably, Absalom led his men into battle against Ahithophel's advice because he wanted to do the honourable thing. If so, he was acting honourably in the course of engaging in an unjust and treasonable war. This fits the image of Absalom as the self-righteous vigilante whose 'honourable' response to his sister's rape leads to an unnecessary and disastrous war.

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Of note, it may in fact also be the case that David actually acted on Ahithophel's advice; the advice that he had clandestinely received via Hushai. Therefore, by providing Hushai with Ahithophel's counsel, Absalom not only gave David the advantage of knowing what advice Absalom had been given, but also the winning strategy. If so, this adds yet another ironic layer.

6.4.8 *2 Samuel 18:19–23*

At the lower level of the narrative Ahimaaz asks Joab if he (Ahimaaz) can be the messenger to tell David that the Lord has delivered David from his enemies (18:19). Joab tells Ahimaaz that he will not tell David the news of the war on this day, as the king's son has been killed (18:20). Joab orders a Cushite to tell David what he has seen, and the Cushite runs off (18:21). Ahimaaz asks Joab again if he can run to tell David the news of the war. Joab replies to Ahimaaz with a question asking him why he wants to tell David the news, given that Ahimaaz has nothing to gain[130] by telling David the news (18:22). Ahimaaz responds that he is adamant that he would like to run, and Joab tells him to run. Ahimaaz then outruns the Cushite (18:23).

At the upper level of the narrative Joab's question is rhetorical and he is implying to Ahimaaz that it would be dangerous for Ahimaaz to inform David of Absalom's death since David may respond violently. The opposition arises from the difference between what Joab says and what Joab means. Joab asks Ahimaaz why he wants to run as he has nothing to gain, whereas the implication is Joab tells him not to run as he will likely be harmed.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. As mentioned, Joab asks a rhetorical question in his speech. Joab's question in 18:22 is a rhetorical question since it is a warning rather than a request for information. The rhetorical question, which is spoken by Joab, is as follows:

> למה־זה אתה רץ בני ולכה אין־בשׂורה מצאת
> (Why would you run, my son, since you have nothing to gain?)[131]

The claim that this question is rhetorical is confirmed in 18:23 where Ahimaaz does not respond to Joab by giving him extra information, but instead replies

130 There are difficulties with the translation of the word בשׂורה. The traditional interpretation suggests that this word may be translated as reward, however, this suggests that the messenger may miss out on something that would be given to him; for example a monetary reward. The interpretation that the messenger has nothing to gain, suggesting that there will be nothing favourable in telling the king that his son is dead, would seem to be a clearer interpretation. (McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 402).

131 Author's translation.

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to the implicit warning in Joab's comment by saying, "Come what may, I will run". McCarter adds that Joab's use of the word בני (my son) in this sentence is either patronizing, condescending, or ironic.[132]

6.4.9 *2 Samuel 18:24–27*

There is no obvious irony in this section aside from the incongruity that while Absalom's death is bad news for David it is in fact good news for Israel. Furthermore, the runners presumably believe that they are bringing the good news of victory, while David's assumed response is that the news is bad news given that Absalom has been killed.

6.4.10 *2 Samuel 18:28–32*

At the lower level in 18:28–31 both of the messengers report the events of the war to David. In 18:28 Ahimaaz prostrates himself in front of David and tells him that he has won the battle. Ahimaaz blesses the Lord for freeing David of his enemies. In 18:29 David asks Ahimaaz if Absalom is well and Ahimaaz replies that he saw a scuffle with Absalom, but that he could not be sure of what happened. David tells Ahimaaz to stay where he is and to stay still (18:30). In 18:31 the Cushite tells David that the Lord has judged David and freed him from those who rose against him. David asks the Cushite if Absalom is well, and the Cushite tells David that Absalom is dead (18:32). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David perceives Absalom's death as a bad thing, whereas the runners perceive Absalom's death as a good thing.

The dominant irony in the narrative arises from the use of the word שׁפטך. The messengers interpret God's judgement to be in favour of David, as David's enemies have been killed. However, the ironist implies that far from God's judgement being in favour of David, the war and the death of Absalom are all part of God's punishment of David for his transgressions (2 Sam. 12:7–12). The opposition in the narrative arises from the contrast between the messenger's account of God's judgement as being favourable to David and the implied account that God's judgement is against David and God is carrying out his promised punishment of David.

The innocence in the passage comes through the innocence of the messengers. However, they cannot be spoken of as confidently unaware, but are instead *ingenues*. In the mode of irony which is *ingenu* irony, the ironist does not feign ignorance, but instead uses a true innocent to expose the incongruity in a situation. Although Ahimaaz dissimulated somewhat with respect to

132 Ibid., 408.

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Absalom's death he, nevertheless, is truly innocent in relation to any knowledge about God's punishing of David. The grade of irony is covert as it is hidden behind the *ingenu.*

6.4.11 *2 Samuel 18:33/19:1*

At the lower level of 18:33 David goes up to his chamber and weeps. He then says:

> בני אבשלום בני בני אבשלום מי־יתן מותי אני תחתיך אבשלום בני בני
> (O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!)[133]

At the upper level of the narrative the ironist is reminded of David's punishment in 2 Samuel 12:14:

> אפס כי־נאץ נאצת את־איבי יהוה בדבר הזה גם הבן הילוד מות ימות
> (Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die).[134]

Although this verse is followed by the death of David's illegitimate child with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:15)—the child being the apparent victim of David's transferred punishment—allusions to Absalom's death are also evident. Certainly, Absalom's revolt is implicitly predicted in 2 Samuel 12:11–12. Moreover, David's own proclamation in 18:33 alludes to this punishment. Not only is the word בני (my son) mentioned five times, but David says that he would have died instead of Absalom. As has already been mentioned, death was the appropriate punishment for David's transgressions (Lev. 20:10).

The opposition in the narrative arises from the incongruity between David's grandiose remark that he would have died instead of Absalom (18:3) and the fact that David actually should have died, given that it was David's transgressions which led to Absalom's death (2 Sam. 11–12). Indeed, this incongruity is ironic. David is the object of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert as it relies on the background knowledge of David's transgressions and incompetencies as king. The sub-category of verbal irony is pretended defence of the victim, as the ironist defends David in the lower level, yet, is pejoratively critical of David in the upper level.

133 Translation from NRS.
134 Translation from NRS.

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6.4.12 *Summary of 2 Samuel 18:1–18:33/19:1*

In 18:1–2a there is an insinuation that David appoints thugs over his army instead of wise and upstanding men. In 18:2b–4 there is an insinuation that David is not the warrior king he once was. In 18:5–7 an example of irony displayed shows that David does not administer justice effectively.

Verses 18:8–9 show irony displayed as the absurdity of Absalom' situation is played out—Absalom became more corrupted than David despite Absalom revolting against David because of David' corruption. In 18:10–11 it is Joab's rhetorical question which is ironic. Joab asks the soldier why he did not kill Absalom. The soldier replies in 18:12–13 in an overstatement that he would not kill Absalom because of David's command, and because Joab would not protect him if he did. In 18:14–17 the major irony is irony displayed as Absalom was defeated by the advice that he did not follow.

In 18:19–23 a rhetorical question challenges Ahimaaz's intention to share with David the news of the war. In 18:24–27 there is an ambiguity concerning whether or not the news that the messengers bring to David is good or bad. Verses 18:28–32 are a case of *ingenu* irony, where it is the true innocent who exposes David's confused response to Absalom's death. In 18:33 the sub-category of verbal irony is pretended defence of the victim.

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CHAPTER 7

The Kingdom Is Restored to David

7.1 2 Samuel 19:1–20:26

7.1.1 *2 Samuel 19:1–3*

At the lower level of 19:1 Joab is told that the king is grieving over Absalom. In 19:2 it is stated that the day which should have been a day of victory for all of the troops was instead a day of mourning because of the king's grief. In 19:3 the soldiers secretly make their way into the city as though they had fled from the battle and were ashamed. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is more concerned about his personal grief than he is for the kingdom. The opposition in the narrative concerns the contrast of David's grief with the soldier's shame. The soldiers should have marched into the city jubilantly, yet they are forced to move into Jerusalem silently and unsure of their reception. The news that the soldiers bring is good for David as a king, but not good news for David as a father. However, the focus of this narrative has been David's failings as a king, and David's failure to lead his people competently. This focus on David's failure as a king may go some way towards addressing Brueggemann's concern that nobody is reported as comforting David in his time of grief and that this constitutes an implied criticism of the Israelite people.[1] The implication is that while David is understandably grief-stricken, Absalom died as a result of trying to usurp David's throne and, more generally, the interests of the Israelites as a people outweighs the well-being of either David or Absalom. The Israelites have just been engaged in a civil war, which was not of their making.

David is the object of ironic attack since, yet again, he manifests deficiencies as a king. He is also the unknowing victim of irony as he is confidently unaware of both his shortcoming in this context and the irony it gives rise to. The grade of irony is covert as it not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category is irony displayed. The irony emerges from the arrangement of the events in which David's grief is contrasted with the shame of the soldiers, who should have returned triumphantly.

1 Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 324.

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7.1.2 *2 Samuel 19:4–8a*

At the lower level of 19:4 David cries out for Absalom in a loud voice. In 19:5 Joab comes to the king's house and speaks to the king. Joab tells David that he (David) had covered the faces of all of the officers in shame despite their successful efforts to save David's life and the lives of his sons, daughters, wives and concubines. In 19:6 Joab states that David has shamed these people out of love of those who hate him and he has earned the hatred of those who love him. Joab mentions that David's actions have made it clear to the commanders and officers that they do not mean anything to David, and that he believes that David would be happy if all of the army were dead so long as Absalom remained alive. In 19:7 Joab tells David to go out and speak kindly to his servants because if he does not do so all of his servants will desert him that night; and if that were to happen it would be the greatest disaster ever to befall David. In 19:8 David takes his seat at the gate. The troops are told that David has taken his seat and they come before the king.

At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Joab has once again saved David; in this case by reminding him of his obligations as king and warning him of the political consequences of him not doing so. Similarly, in the Uriah narrative Joab changes David's command to make a situation workable (2 Sam. 11:16–17), and Joab warns David to join the war in Rabbah (2 Sam. 12:27–28). The implied pejorative criticism of David relies in part on the word choice and the exaggerated language in Joab's speech.

McCarter argues that the words love and hate in 19:6 are political terms.[2] The relationship between David and his soldiers and the relation between David and Absalom is also political (albeit, not entirely so, given Absalom is his son). Accordingly, Joab is warning David to act in favour of those to whom he owes his primary political allegiance in this situation, namely, his soldiers.

Moreover, Joab's warning to David is emphasised by his use of exaggerated language. Anderson writes, "Joab's scathing rebuke of David contains a number of exaggerations. It is questionable (although, not impossible) whether Absalom would have really exterminated the house of David in its entirety, including his wives, concubines, and daughters."[3] The warning is also emphasised by his use of the scathing language which follows in 19:6. Furthermore, in 19:7 Joab swears an oath and continues his diatribe.

The substance of what Joab says to David is true. David does have a disposable attitude towards the troops and has an unwarranted regard for Absalom who was trying to kill him and usurp his thrown. Although Joab and the

2 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 409.

3 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 227.

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soldiers who killed Absalom have directly opposed David's command, it must be stressed that Absalom was fixated on destroying David and usurping the throne. Even if it were the case that David genuinely believed that he would have been prepared to die in place of Absalom (18:33), he would still be culpable for failing to discharge his duties as king. Moreover, David is contemptuous of the people who serve and protect him.

As detailed above, the ironist in 19:4–8a implies that Joab has saved David by reminding him of his obligations as king and warning him of the political consequences for him and the kingdom of his not doing so. Ironically, although David is the king and, as such, supposedly wise and politically astute, it is his subordinate whose actions are necessary for him to act as a king should. David is the object of ironic attack. While David understands Joab's warning and, and as a consequence, goes to meet the soldiers, it is doubtful that he grasps the irony of the situation. Therefore, he is probably the unknowing victim of irony. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode is impersonal. The subcategory is overstatement, albeit the substance of what Joab says is true.

Of note, it is also ironical that Joab, the current saviour of David, was the person who was behind the ruse which tricked David into bringing Absalom back to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 14:2).

7.1.3 *2 Samuel 9:11–12*

At the lower level of 9:11 David requests Zadok and Abiathar to send a message to the elders of Judah. The message is a question and is as follows: "Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house? The talk of Israel has come to the king. You are my kin, you are my bone and my flesh; why then should you be the last to bring back the king?" (19:11–12). At the upper level of the narrative this is not a request for information but an implicit threat. The implication is that Israel will restore David to a position of power as king and that it would not only be embarrassing to Judah if they were not the first to do so, but that there will also be dire consequences for ignoring David's threat. The conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition. Instead of asking "Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house?" The true message of the rhetorical question is the following command, "You must be the first to bring the king back to his house, or else!" This message is strengthened by an allusion to the covenant that the tribes of Israel made with David in Hebron (2 Sam. 5:1). In 2 Samuel 5:1 the Israelites say that they are of the same bone and flesh as David. In 19:12 David sends a message to the elders of Judah which says that they are of the same bone and flesh as David. Thus, the force of David's threat is strengthened by an allusion to the covenant that Judah made with David when they accepted David as their king in place of Saul whom they rejected. David feigns

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innocence in this rhetorical question. David is also the object of ironic attack as he must threaten the Judahites in order to be accepted as king.

The irony is covert as it is not immediately apprehended. The type of irony is impersonal and the sub-category of impersonal irony is the rhetorical question.

7.1.4 *2 Samuel 19:13–15*

At the lower level of 19:13 David tells Zadok and Abiathar the message he would like relayed to Amasa. The message is as follows: "Are you not my bone and my flesh? So, may God do to me, and more, if you are not the commander of my army from now on in place of Joab". Amasa convinces the Judahites to allow David to return as king, and he does. At the upper level of the narrative the implication is that David is bribing Amasa with the offer of a plumb role in the army. This is in contrast to the appeal to covenantal loyalty and family bonds. The innocence in the narrative is David's feigned ignorance. David is also the object of ironic attack as the narrator is pejoratively critical of David's inducement to Amasa. The irony is covert and impersonal. The sub-category of impersonal irony is innuendo.

7.1.5 *2 Samuel 19:16–20*

At the lower level of the narrative Shimei hurries to meet King David and does so in the company of a thousand people from the tribe of Benjamin (19:16–17). Also, Ziba waded across the Jordan river with his sons and servants in order to assist David and his retinue in their crossing (19:17–18). Shimei falls down before David when David is about to cross the Jordan. Shimei pleads with David not to find him guilty for his treatment of David when David was fleeing Israel. In particular, Shimei mentions that he knows he has sinned (19:18b–20). At the upper level of the narrative is the implication that, in a corrupt environment, those who speak out for what is right suffer and those who are opportunistic prosper. This implication arises in the incongruity between Shimei who railed against David's unjust behaviour and Ziba who brought David a bribe and was awarded his master's estate in return. This incongruity in the narrative is emphasized in the contrast between Shimei who acts desperately and Ziba who is relaxed and somewhat smug. The innocence is the feigned ignorance of the ironist.

The irony is covert and impersonal irony. The mode of impersonal irony is irony displayed as the events have been displayed or crafted in such a way so as to emphasize the contrast between Shimei and Ziba. The irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent and needs to be discerned from anomalies in the narration. One such anomaly is the exaggerated account of Ziba's actions. In the latter case McCarter claims, "… Hebrew *waysallehu hayyarden,* the

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meaning of which can be clarified by reference to Aramaic *salleh,* "cleave, split; penetrate, pass through." The sense here is either that Ziba's party actually split the Jordan, i.e., damned it up so David could cross dryshod, or, more likely that they waded in and conveyed the royal party across on their shoulders".[4] This would appear to be an overstated presentation of the lengths that Ziba would go to in order to ingratiate himself to David.

7.1.6 *2 Samuel 19:21–23*

At the lower level of 19:21 Abishai responds to Shimei's plea with the remark, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?" In 19:22 David responds to Abishai with a few rhetorical questions, including: asking what he should do with the sons of Zeruiah; by asking if anybody in Israel should be put to death on this day; and by asking if it is not the case that David knows that he is king over Israel? In 19:23 David states, upon an oath, that Shimei will not die.

Two of the rhetorical questions in this passage are similar to rhetorical questions that have previously appeared in the SN. For instance, in 2 Samuel 16:9 Abishai says to David concerning Shimei, "Why should this dead dog curse the lord my king? Let me go over and take off his head". I have previously suggested that Abishai's remark is appropriate given that it is against the law to curse the king. Furthermore, I have argued that the ironist in 2 Samuel 16:9 criticises David because his decisions are politically motivated, and not based on the laws.

The second rhetorical question that has already appeared in the SN in a similar form is David's following remark, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should today become an adversary to me?" (2 Sam. 19:22). In 2 Samuel 16:10 David remarks, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so'". In respect of 2 Samuel 16:10 it has been argued that this is a placatory remark. It can reasonably be argued that the comment in 19:22 is also placatory given that the only reason David is opposed to Abishai's suggestion is that it would anger the Benjamites accompanying Shimei and, thereby, impede his efforts to unify Israel—not because David deplores violence as has been otherwise suggested.

At the upper level, it can be assumed that David's actions have not been adjudicated according to the laws or because of mercy extended towards Shimei. Instead, it would seem that David's is trying to present a public image that is conciliatory. This is, of course, only a pretence as ultimately Shimei is killed

4 McCarter, *II Samuel*, 420.

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by David's son, at David's instigation, because of his treatment of David (1 Kgs. 2:8–9; 2:44–46). It can, therefore, be assumed that David's emphasis on the word "today" (it is expressed three times in the verse 19:22) implies that there will be no deaths on this day, but certainly at a later date! Therefore, ultimately, David does not keep the oath that he makes with Shimei (19:23). The irony is covert, as it is reliant on background information. The irony is also impersonal, and is conveyed by the presence of rhetorical questions. David is the object of ironic attack, as he is not concerned with upholding laws, but is instead motivated by political manoeuvring.

7.1.7 *2 Samuel 19:24*

At the lower level of 19:24 it is stated that Mephibosheth came down to meet the king and that he had not taken care of himself since the day that David left. At the upper level of the narrative the implicit message is that Mephibosheth was loyal to David. This implication is conveyed in the overstatement of Mephibosheth's ragged appearance that was consistently ragged until the day that David returned in safety. The implication being that Mephibosheth was so saddened by David's departure from Jerusalem that he could not even look after himself. Note, that this is in stark contrast to Ziba's portrayal of Mephibosheth as an active claimant to David's throne (2 Sam. 16:3). Therefore, the mode of impersonal irony is overstatement. David is the object of ironic attack as the implication is that David has given away the estate of an innocent man. To be specific David has given away the estate of Jonathan's kin whom David had sworn to show חסד to (1 Sam. 20:13–15; 2 Sam. 9:1–10).

The mode of irony is covert as it is not immediately apprehended that the narrative is overstated. The verse begins by suggesting that Mephibosheth went to a great effort to meet David, as it states that Mephibosheth, who was crippled, 'came down' to meet David.[5] This in itself is not an overstatement, as it would have been a great effort for Mephibosheth to have come down and meet with David. Rather, overstated language is evident in the belaboured description of Mephibosheth's failure to look after himself. Instead of making this fact in succinct terms the narrative draws out the extent of Mephibosheth's lack of self-care by listing the things that he had not attended to. For instance,

> ולא־עשׂה רגליו ולא־עשׂה שׂפמו ואת־בגדיו לא כבס
>
> (… he had not cared for his feet or hands, he had not trimmed his moustache or washed his clothes …)[6]

5 John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel. Your Kingdom Come.* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 463.

6 Translation from NJB.

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Lack of physical maintenance was a sign of grief in the Ancient Near East (Ps. 23:5; 45:8; 104:15; Job 1:20; Lev. 19:27). Therefore, the extent of Mephibosheth's concern for David is conveyed in the belaboured description of his lack of self-care. The implication then is that Ziba had lied to David in 2 Samuel 16:1–4 when he said to David that Mephibosheth was disloyal.[7] In believing Ziba's deception, David is the object of ironic attack, who does not offer the due process of justice, and who is evidently a fool for being deceived yet again.

7.1.8 *2 Samuel 19:25–30*

At the lower level of 19:25 David asks Mephibosheth why he did not go to meet David. Mephibosheth responds that he was deceived by Ziba who did not saddle a donkey as requested by Mephibosheth (19:26) and who slandered Mephibosheth to David (19:27a). In 19:27b Mephibosheth says that David is like "the angel of God" and he asks David to do what seems right to him. This is followed by a further appeal to David (19:28). David responds in 19:29 by awarding Mephibosheth and Ziba half of the disputed estate each. In 19:30 Mephibosheth declines David's offer.

At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is not like "the angel of God". For this phrase is used to indicate that the king is an excellent administrator of justice (see the discussion in 2 Samuel 14:15–17). In this instance David does not administer justice correctly. For, David is told that Ziba deceived Mephibosheth (19:26), yet he splits the estate between the men. The correct course of action would be to decide who was at fault by recourse to wisdom and good judgement. In doing so the innocent person is vindicated and the guilty person is freed from his or her sin by the punishment of the crime. For instance, in Deuteronomy 25:1–2 it states that if there is a dispute between two men, not only will the innocent man be acquitted, but the guilty man will be punished. Yet, who is the guilty party, Mephibosheth or Ziba? Mephibosheth's closing statement in 19:30 indicates that Mephibosheth is only concerned with David's safety, and indeed, is not preoccupied with the estate. Furthermore, we might conclude that Ziba is the untrustworthy one given that he offers an inducement to David in 2 Samuel 16:2. Therefore, it is a more convincing argument that Mephibosheth was being truthful as opposed to Ziba. Regardless, David's ambivalence concerning who owns the estate is troubling and does not indicate that he is like "the angel of God". On the contrary, God hates bribes and false testimony. Furthermore, David is unlike God in that David does not care for justice. David's lack of concern for justice or חסד

7 Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 366.

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is the object of ironic attack in this section. He is also an unknowing victim of this irony.

The conflict in the narrative is the opposition between the statement that David is like the angel of God (19:27) and the implied message, that David is not like the angel of God. Or, that David is not a good administrator of justice. Therefore, the mode of irony is impersonal, and the category is praising in order to blame. The sub-category is (a) praise for desirable qualities known to be lacking.

7.1.9 *2 Samuel 19:31–39*

At the lower level of the narrative Barzillai escorts David to the Jordan. It is stated that Barzillai is an aged and wealthy man who assisted David while he was in Mahanaim (19:31–32). David invites Barzillai to go to Jerusalem with him, and tells him that he will look after Barzillai in Jerusalem (19:33). Barzillai explains that he is too old to go to Jerusalem (19:34–35) and that he would prefer to return to his home town and die there (19:37). Barzillai then offers David his servant Chimham to go with David and to assist him (19:37). David responds that he will take Chimham with him and treat Chimham in the way that Barzillai would have David treat him. David also says that he will continue to look after Barzillai.

At the upper level the ironist implies that there is more to this communication than meets the eye, particularly with reference to the role of Chimham. At the explicit level Barzillai declines David's offer to travel with David to Jerusalem (19:33) and to be rewarded in this way (19:34–36). Instead Barzillai offers David his servant Chimham ostensibly to David to assist David with whatever David needs (19:37). Yet, David responds that he will do with Chimham whatever seems good to Barzillai and that he will look after Barzillai. This would suggest that the conversation was one of political manoeuvring and dissembling rather than a straightforward exchange of ideas. As such, this episode falls into the sub-category of impersonal irony that is innuendo. The conflict in the two levels is an opposition between what is said and what is meant. Barzillai says that he is offering Chimham to David in order that Chimham serve David, yet, the implied message in the narrative is that Barzillai either cannot or does not want to go to Jerusalem and, in any case, as a wealthy man does not need David's rewards. But rather than refuse David's offer of a reward he suggests that Chimham can accompany David, thereby providing David with a further benefit. However, David responds to Barzillai's offer by saying, in effect, that Chimham will receive the reward due to Barzillai on Barzillai's behalf. Barzillai now goes along with this charade. Barzillai's feigned innocence provides the innocence in the exchange. David is the object of ironic

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attack since presumably he must know that far from providing Barzillai (via Chimham) with a reward for Barzallai's past loyalty he is in fact taking the reward of the servant Chimham for himself.

The irony is covert as it is recognised in the anomalous language. Notably, the exaggeration of Barzillai's response to David, in the form of six rhetorical questions, alerts the reader to the irony in the text. This exchange also meets the requirements for Perry and Sternberg's pattern of irony whereby exaggerated language is followed by concise language. The exaggerated language is expressed in the rhetorical questions and in Barzillai's request to stay in his own town until he dies (19:37a). The concise phrase, where the emphasis lays, is 19:37b and is as follows:

והנה עבדך כמהם

(But here is your servant Chimham).[8]

7.1.10 *2 Samuel 19:41–43*

At the lower level of 19:41 the people of Israel ask the king, David, why the Judeans stole the king away and brought the king, his household and his men across the Jordan river into Judah. In 19:42 the Judeans tell the Israelites that the king is closer in kin to them. They also ask the Israelites the following questions: (1) Why are you angry over this matter?; (2) Have the Judeans eaten at the king's expense?; (3) Has the king given the Judeans any gifts? In the lower level of 19:43 the Israelites respond to the Judeans that they have a greater share in David because they have ten tribes. They also ask why the Judeans have despised the Israelites. In addition, they ask the Judeans whether it is true that the Israelites first spoke of bringing David back as king. The narrator states that the Judeans win the war of words.

The questions being asked are in fact rhetorical questions. As such they have implications at the upper level. The rhetorical question at 19:41 should be understood as an accusation rather than merely a request for information. The Israelites accuse the Judeans of stealing David away. The Judeans respond with rhetorical questions that are also accusations rather than requests for information (19:42). The implication in this set of questions is that the Israelites motives are impure, and that they have accepted bribes. In 19:43 the rhetorical question of the Israelites ("Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?") is a response to the previous question of the Judeans, namely, the question as to why the Israelites are angry that David went over to the Judeans. There is a further implication in all this that the Judeans' motives were impure

8 Translation NKJ.

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in taking David to Judea as they needed to be implicitly threatened by David before they decided to bring him back (2 Sam. 19:11–12). The innocence in the narrative is the feigned innocence of the narrator. The grade of irony is overt as the intended message is apprehended immediately. The mode of irony is impersonal and the rhetorical question. Both the Judeans and the Israelites are the objects of ironic attack since they are now fighting over the king that they had just previously fought against!

7.2 2 Samuel 20:1–26

7.2.1 *2 Samuel 20:1*

At the lower level of 20:1 the Benjaminite, Sheba the Son of Bichri, sounds his trumpet and declares that Israel has no portion or shares in the king and that the Israelites should go to their tents. This is untrue, the Israelites have a larger share in the king than the Judeans do, as is evident in their claim in 19:43. The relevant background knowledge at this point is that David has sent a message to the Judeans suggesting that they should be the first to bring him back as king to Jerusalem (19:11–13). Therefore, the implication at the upper level is that David is not prepared to honour the Israelites share in him. The conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition. Bichri says, "We have no portion in David, no share in the son of Jesse!" (20:1); however, the actual message that he is trying to convey is that although Israel *does* have a share in David, indeed a larger share than Judea, David will not honour it. The innocence in the narrative is the feigned innocence of the ironist. David is the object of ironic attack as he will not honour the Israelites share in him. The grade of the irony is largely overt given that the Israelites had just said that they do have a share in David in the preceding verse. Therefore, the irony is immediately apprehended. The mode of irony is impersonal and an innuendo.

7.2.2 *2 Samuel 20:9–10*

At the lower level of 20:9 Joab asks Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" The relevant background knowledge at this point is that David appointed Amasa as commander of his army in place of Joab because Joab killed Absalom. Accordingly, at the upper level the implied message is full of menace and can be interpreted as, "I am going to kill you, you traitor!" The conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition. Joab asks Amasa if he is well when Joab intends to convey that he will harm him. Or if שלום is intended to mean peace rather than well-being then the opposition is between peace and murder. Furthermore, in the lower level Joab calls Amasa "my brother" which suggests the bonding of

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family as opposed to Joab's intended message of traitor, which suggests disunity and enmity. The implied message is confirmed by the actions that surround it. Joab approaches Amasa aggressively with his sword on display (20:8) and possibly even held in his hands (20:10). Furthermore, directly after speaking to Amasa Joab grabs his beard which is an offensive action.[9] Saliently, Joab kills Amasa (20:10) which indicates that this was not a friendly exchange.

The irony is impersonal and an innuendo. The grade of irony is overt as it is immediately apparent that Joab's aggressive actions conflict with the comment at the lower level.

7.2.3 *Summary of Irony in 2 Samuel 19:1–20:26*

In 19:1–3 the mode of irony displayed suggests that David's decision to ignore the troops was a great insult to them. Verses 19:4–8a show David to lack judgement and be in a state of confusion. For David weeps for Absalom who has set out to destroy him, and yet David is angry at his army who have saved his life. This irony comes through in the use of overstated language. In 19:11–12 David sends a message to the elders of Israel by way of a rhetorical question. At the lower level this question is a request for information at the upper level it is a threat. In 19:13–15 the innuendo implies that David gives an inducement to Amasa. 19:16–20 continues this theme. Ziba is rewarded by David with Mephibosheth's estate when Ziba brings stolen goods from Mephibosheth's estate to David during David's exile. Shimei who stood up for justice is, by contrast, presented as pathetic. Irony displayed brings this contrast to the fore. Of course, in 19:21–23 it would seem that David is kind to Shimei. However, this is only at the lower level. At the upper level the implication is that David is merely trying to present a conciliatory public image. After all he does later order Shimei's execution. The irony in this section arises from rhetorical questions. In 19:24 Mephibosheth's loyalty to David is emphasized by way of ironic overstatement—David does not offer Mephibosheth justice. Thereby, it is no surprise that in 19:25–30 Mephibosheth's comment conveying that David is a good administrator of justice is ironic and a case of praising in order to blame. In 19:31–39 there is an innuendo that David is politically motivated and not motivated by justice. In 19:41–43 the Israelites and the Judeans ask rhetorical questions that are implied accusations. 20:1 is an innuendo that David will not honour the share that the Israelites have in him as king. In 20:9–10 there is an innuendo. Joab asks Amasa if he is well when Joab intends to convey that he will harm him.

9 John Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 297.

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CHAPTER 8

Solomon Rises to the Throne

8.1 1 Kings 1:1–53

8.1.1 *1 Kings 1:1–4*

At the lower level of the narrative it is stated that King David was old and that he could not get warm (1:1). David's servants suggest to David that they find a young virgin to wait on the king, to be his attendant, and to lie in his bosom in order to keep him warm (1:2). The servants search for a beautiful girl and find Abishag the Shunammite who they present to the king (1:3). It is remarked that the girl was very beautiful and that she became the king's attendant but that the king did not know her (1:4). At the upper level of the narrative it is implied that the great lady's man, David, is feeble and impotent. This kind of ridicule is consistent with the genre of satire even though it is unacceptable in many quarters of today's civil society to make fun of a person's advanced age and sexual dysfunction. Indeed, this form of ridicule is, according to Muecke, irony in the style of burlesque. In this style of irony a high character is presented in a lowly way. Thus, the most powerful man in Israel is presented as being without power. This is the conflict in the narrative between the upper (implicit) and lower (explicit) levels.

The innocence is the feigned innocence of the ironist. King David is the object of ironic attack as it is his character that is being ridiculed and diminished. The mode of irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of irony is burlesque as already noted. The irony is covert and is conveyed in part by anomalies in the language. Saliently, we find here an example of Perry and Sternberg's verbose/concise pattern. In this instance, 1:1–4b is the verbose section. This passage is replete with sexual language. A young virgin is sought, although she was to attend to the king it could be assumed that her primary role was to serve David sexually (1:2). This is expressed in the following innuendo:

ושׁכבה בחיקך והם לאדני המלך (1:2)

(… let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may be warm).[1]

1 Translation from RSV.

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To "lie in your bosom" implies sexual activity.[2] Verse 1:2 mentions all of the activities that the young virgin will carry out for King David, but the emphasis is on her proposed sexual service to the king. This emphasis is stressed in the commentary that the servants looked for "a beautiful girl" (1:3) and that they found "a very beautiful girl" (1:4). Therefore, it would seem that the servants were preoccupied with finding a girl with remarkable physical attributes rather than a girl with remarkable skills as a servant. The stress on her beauty heightens the ridicule of David, as does the following concise remark that implies that David could not perform sexually with the very beautiful girl:

והמלך לא ידעה (1:4)

(… but the king did not know her).[3]

8.1.2 *1 Kings 1:5–10*

At the lower level of the narrative Adonijah declares that he will be king and prepares chariots, horsemen, and fifty men to accompany him (1:5). It is stated that at no time did David question Adonijah's behaviour. It also stated that he was handsome and born after Absalom (1:6). Adonijah conferred with Joab and Abiathar who supported him (1:7). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Adonijah should have rightly been the next in line to the throne. This implication arises with knowledge of the three qualities mentioned in verse 1:6 that are as follows: (1) Adonijah's behaviour was impeccable according to David (possibly even in this instance David had no reason to object to Adonijah's preparations to be king); (2) he was handsome (a standard measure of one's worthiness to be king); and (3) he was born after Absalom and next in line to the throne (assuming Chilead had died). This last point would seem to contradict the argument that primogeniture was not established at this time,[4] or at the very least it would seem to contradict the argument that the order of birth was not a consideration for succession. Indeed, being handsome was thought to signify that God had graced an individual so it would follow that birth order would also be deemed an act of God. Furthermore, Solomon's later statement "Ask for him the kingdom as well! For he is my elder brother …" (1 Kgs. 2:22) would suggest that it was standard practice for the eldest son to inherit the king's throne. Accordingly, while the narrative does not explicitly mention that Adonijah was rightly in line to the throne, this is implied. For

2 Mordechai Cogan, *I Kings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 156.

3 Translation NKJ.

4 Jerome T. Walsh, *Berit Olam. Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry. I Kings,* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 6.

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the mention of the three significant determinates of kingship are presented without further commentary, thereby implying that Adonijah was the rightful heir to the throne.

The conflict in the narrative is heightened by the matter-of-fact presentation of facts. This presentation is incongruent with the loaded message they intend to convey—that Adonijah should have been the rightful king. Moreover, contrary to commentaries that suggest that Adonijah's actions are unacceptable and that his good character is questionable,[5] Adonijah's actions may have been the morally correct actions to take, given David's infirmity. This would certainly be consistent with the comment in 1:6 that David never had reason to question Adonijah's actions. Therefore, the extra pronoun in 1:5 (אני אמלך), that is so often interpreted as an indicator of Adonijah's vanity,[6] could also indicate resolve. After all, King David was aged and bedridden (1 Kgs. 1:1–5). This left Israel in a supremely vulnerable position. It would have been honourable for somebody to prepare for the role of the king. Moreover, it would seem natural that Adonijah would assume that this was to be his role. It is also worth noting in the narrative that at this point Adonijah merely says "I *will* be king" (1:5) not that he was king.

The irony in this instance is covert and impersonal. The sub-category of impersonal irony is innuendo. The innuendo is that Adonijah is the rightful heir to the throne.

8.1.3 *1 Kings 1:11–35*

At the lower level of this narrative Nathan and Bathsheba ensure that Solomon becomes the King of Israel. To be specific, Nathan tells Bathsheba to go into David and to say to him (ask him) if it was the case that David swore to Bathsheba that he would make Solomon the king (1:13). Nathan tells Bathsheba that he will come to David while she is talking to him and confirm what she says (1:14). Bathsheba does as Nathan instructs her (1:15–21). Nathan goes to David and confirms what Bathsheba says, as planned, albeit apparently in the absence of Bathsheba (1:22–27). Later on King David summons Bathsheba (1:28) and David swears that Solomon will become the next king (1:29–30). Bathsheba does obeisance to David (1:31). David summons Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah (1:32) and tells them to take Solomon to Gihon and to anoint him (1:33–35).

5 Marvin Sweeney, *I & II Kings* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 54.
6 Ibid.

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The possible implications at the upper level vary depending on whether or not David made an oath to make Solomon king and whether or not Adonijah had been anointed king—matters about which there is uncertainty. What we do know is that Adonijah was preparing to be king. The following discussion will consider all of these options. In the first instance let us assume that David did not make an oath. If this is the case then Nathan and Bathsheba are lying and trying to trick David. In doing so they would be relying on his senility and his consequent inability to remember if he made an oath or not.

Most commentators favour this option. Take for example Martin Mulders following comment: "The author suggests that David, old and senile, not only remembers nothing of what he might possibly have promised at some time in the past, but is also very amenable to being influenced. This is the circumstance which Nathan and Bathsheba exploits."[7] However, this argument is somewhat contradicted by the presentation of David's rather lucid state in 1:28–35. In Jerome Walsh's words, "The figure of David undergoes a startling transformation in these two scenes. In place of the feeble, passive, even unresponsive old man of the first half of the story, we witness a determined figure, able to make a firm decision and act unhesitatingly on it. Whatever the king's physical frailties, he is clearly in control of his mental faculties."[8] Furthermore, in order to accept the proposition that Nathan and Bathsheba are tricking David the reader must accept that Nathan, the holy prophet who chided David in 2 Samuel 12:7–12, is corrupt and irreligious. Surely, it is of poor faith for a religious man to lie to a dying man about an oath that he did not make to God!

It has been argued that Nathan's potentially corrupt character is the reason that his role as prophet is stressed so emphatically. For instance, instead of calling Nathan simply by his name, as is the narrator's usual choice, Nathan is spoken of as "Nathan the prophet". Walsh argues that the reason for this anomaly in the language is to remind the reader that the 'schemer' is also the prophet.[9] It may, of course, be true that Nathan's role as prophet is stressed to emphasize this potentially grievous transgression, but it may also be the case that Nathan's role as a prophet is being stressed in order to suggest to the reader that Nathan must enforce religious law.

If it is the case that Nathan and Bathsheba are lying to David about an oath he made, but David cannot remember if he made an oath or not because of dementia, then the irony in this section is burlesque. In this scenario David, as

7 Martin J Mulder, *I Kings* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 54–55.
8 Jerome T Walsh, *I Kings*, 24.
9 Jerome T. Walsh, *I Kings*, 10.

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a high character is ridiculed as he cannot even remember if he made an oath or not. It would seem cruel to make fun of a person with dementia; however, this is in keeping with satirical writing.

The second scenario is as follows. David did make an oath (presumably sometime in the past) to make Solomon the king and is now in an invidious position because he is not objecting to Adonijah's preparations to become king (1:6). If this is the case, then Nathan and Bathsheba's manipulations are in the service of ensuring that David endorses Solomon as his successor over Adonijah. It could then be assumed that Bathsheba's motive is to ensure that her son, Solomon, becomes king as was promised. Nathan's motive is to ensure that an oath to God is honoured. This is understandable given his role as prophet and religious enforcer, so to speak. However, it still remains the case that arguably David was not entitled to make an oath to make Solomon king, given that Solomon was not next in line to be king. This difficulty remains regardless of whether or not Nathan and Bathsheba are lying to David and whether or not David re-states the oath he made or makes an oath for the first time in 1:29–30.

If we accept that David did make an oath to make Solomon king, there are a further two possible scenarios concerning Adonijah's actions: (1) David made an oath to make Solomon king but Adonijah has been inaugurated as king by the people (and, presumably, anointed as king by a priest), and (2) David made an oath to Solomon and Adonijah is merely preparing to be king (but is, as yet, not anointed).

In the first instance, Nathan and Bathsheba's intentions would seem to be reasonable. Bathsheba is making the case for her son, Solomon, who has a claim to the throne—by virtue of the king's oath. Nathan is ensuring that an oath to God (by David to Solomon) is being honoured. There is no irony in this scenario as it would appear to be a straight-forward rendering of events.

As far as the second situation is concerned—that Adonijah has not been inaugurated (or, therefore, anointed) as king—there are two strong possibilities: (1) Nathan and Bathsheba are outright lying to David concerning Adonijah's anointment, and; (2) Nathan and Bathsheba are exaggerating or overstating events for effect. The narrative allows for both interpretations. Consider the following uncertainties in the text. (i) Nathan tells Bathsheba and David that Adonijah has become king, Bathsheba repeats this to David (1:11, 18). However, the narrative otherwise only tells us that Adonijah said he *will* become king (1:5); (ii) It is unclear if the festival at En-rogel is an anointing or not (1:9). Both Bathsheba and Nathan interpret it this way (1:19; 25). However, Nathan and Bathsheba tell David that the sacrifices have been made in abundance (a sign

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of an anointing) (1:19, 25), when there is no other evidence of this in the narrative. Furthermore, Nathan tells David that Adonijah's invited guests are all exclaiming "Long live King Adonijah!" although there is no evidence of this beside Nathan's word (1:25).

If Nathan and Bathsheba are wilfully depicting Adonijah as being treasonous (in Adonijah claiming to be king while David is still alive) when he is not being treasonous, then both Nathan and Bathsheba are guilty of a serious transgression, namely, falsely accusing someone of treason. If Nathan and Bathsheba are engaging in this deceit they are presumably motivated by the desire to ensure that Solomon is made king. They intend to cause David to be angry with Adonijah and reject him as king. If so this could signify a corruption of, particularly, Nathan's character. In this instance, Nathan is described in the same terms as Joab and Absalom who were both depicted as characters who were displeased with David's rule and who tried to manipulate him in order to achieve a, presumably, more righteous outcome. Yet, in both instances we witness the decline of the moral fibre of these characters in their supposed zeal for righteousness. In the case of Joab, he would appear to be critical of David's corruption in the story of Uriah (2 Sam. 11:19–21). However, Joab is later depicted throughout the narrative as a character who takes the law into his own hands (2 Sam. 18:14; 20:10). Absalom is similarly critical of David's inability to administer justice (2 Sam. 15:3), but also descends into an unsuccessful vigilante character who also takes the law into his own hands by creating an insurrection against David, the rightful king (2 Sam. 15:1–6). Presumably, Absalom's desire to mete our justice against Amnon is his reason for manipulating David in 2 Samuel 14:2–21.

The irony here may be spoken of as impersonal irony with the sub-category of pretended defence of the victim. David is being tricked and manipulated and the reader is inclined to defend David. However, when the content of the narrative is considered comprehensively it appears that David is the fool and the victim of the irony as a reasonable person would not be expected to be in David's position, ie. supporting two sons to be king.

However, another possibility is that Nathan and Bathsheba are both presented as overstating Adonijah's royal pretensions. In this manner they are presenting a reasonable argument in a presumptive manner. It may seem evident to Nathan and Bathsheba that Adonijah's actions, amidst his preparations to become king, could be interpreted as furthering his ambitions to be king.

Either way we are still left with the knowledge that David has made an oath to one prince and has not objected to another prince's preparations to become king. Therefore, we have an example of another instance where David acts

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foolishly and puts the security of Israel at risk. David is also the object of ironic attack as his foolishness has serious implications for Israel and for the supporters of each son—as they will potentially be killed.

8.1.4 *1 Kings 1:36–37*

At the lower level of the narrative Benaiah answers David in the following way: "Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so ordain (1:36)". Benaiah then goes on to wish that Solomon's throne is greater than King David's (1:37). At the upper level of the narrative is the implication that this appointment has not been ordained by God but has instead been decided by David. For instance,

> Benaiah continues with what is probably a wish: "May Yahweh ordain …," though the Hebrew can be understood as a simple statement of fact expressing Benaiah's confidence in the rightness of David's decision: "Yahweh will ordain …" Like Bathsheba in verse 17, he relates Yahweh directly to David ("the God of my lord the king") rather than to the whole people as David did. This may be standard court flattery, but it also reflects an aggrandizement of the intermediary role of the king that is not fully compatible with the thinking of pre-monarchic Yahwism. If his words are understood as a statement rather than as a wish, the aggrandizement is extreme: the king has said it, therefore God wills it.[10]

The conflict in the narrative, is therefore, an opposition. At the lower explicit level Benaiah wishes that God will ordain this decision, yet, at the upper level it is implied that this decision is not God ordained. Benaiah is the unknowing victim of the irony as he is confidently unaware of the implications of his comment. David is the object of ironic attack as he has decided who the next king will be without due consideration of the elements that indicate that a candidate is endorsed by God, ie. birth order and attractiveness—elements that are beyond human control. The irony is impersonal and is an example of pretended agreement with the victim. In this instance, the narrative endorses Benaiah's exclamation at the lower level, but it is only pretended agreement at the upper level of the narrative.

The irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent and must be discerned by the language and background knowledge of the text. In this case the primary knowledge that informs the irony is the knowledge that kings are anointed by the people (2 Sam. 2:4; 5:3; 2 Kgs. 11:12; 23:30) or by Yahweh (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1; 15:17; 16:12–13; 2 Sam. 12:7; 2 Kgs 9:36)—and not by the king.

10 Jerome T. Walsh, *I Kings*, 24.

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8.2 1 Kings 2:1–46

8.2.1 *1 Kings 2:1–9*

At the lower level of the narrative David talks to Solomon as David nears death (2:1). He tells Solomon that he is about to die (2:2) and instructs Solomon to keep all of the Lord's statutes, ordinances, testimonies, and commandments as they are written in the Law of Moses (2:3). David tells Solomon that God promised him that if his heirs were faithful to God there would always be a successor to David on the throne (2:4). David then reminds Solomon of what Joab did to him (by killing Abner and Amasa in peacetime, thereby putting Israel in jeopardy) and he suggests to Solomon that he deal with Joab and ensure that Joab does not go to Sheol (the afterlife) in peace (2:5–6). Furthermore, David instructs Solomon to deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai (2:7). Finally, David tells Solomon to send Shimei to Sheol in blood (2:8–9).

At the upper level of the narrative is the implication that David is largely disinterested in the laws, but is more concerned with settling scores. Walsh argues that this passage has more in line with opportunism than deuteronomistic morality.

> David may use deuteronomistic language for purposes quite different from a deuteronomistic theologian. Here, for example, David is in the process of giving Solomon his final advice, one king to another, on how to ensure his success. But David's suggestions are made by innuendo, indicated by oblique references like "act according to wisdom" (v.6) and "you are a wise man; you will know what to do" (v.9). David expects Solomon to be shrewd enough to read between the lines of his advice. The deuteronomistic platitudes in verses 2–4 function much like the references to wisdom. Solomon is to hear both platitudes and pragmatism and to read between the lines: "Obey the law (you know what I mean) and make sure you protect yourself from your enemies".[11]

David is, therefore, the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of this irony. He is the victim in as much as he is unaware of the religious offence in his statement. He is the object of ironic attack in as much as his comment is a further indication of his corrupt nature and disregard for the sacredness of the laws.

The mode of irony in this instance is impersonal irony and the sub-category of irony is parody. David's 'testament' is a parody of the idea that kings are

11 Jerome T. Walsh, *I Kings*, 38–39.

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morally upright and obedient to the laws. Please see Deuteronomy 31–33, Joshua 23–24 and 1 Samuel 12. I note that Deuteronomy 17:17–20 outlines that a king should be committed to justice. By contrast, David's proposed actions are unjust. The grade of irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent and is discerned in part by way of an appreciation of the anomalies in the language and the background history of the story. As far the tone of the language is concerned there is a jarring difference between the language in 2:1–4 (that appears to be noble) and the following passage 2:5–9 (that appears to be self-serving). Furthermore, the background knowledge of the narrative suggests that David's decisions are not based on just judgements but are instead calculated to ensure that his legacy survives untainted. Consider the following examples.

The first-person David mentions to Solomon is Joab. David says to Solomon that Joab killed Abner and Amasa in peacetime to avenge blood that had been shed in war (2:5). Of note is David's following comment in 2:5:

> וגם אתה ידעת את אשׁר־עשׂה יואב בן־צרויה
> (You know too what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me …)[12]

However, this comment requires further discussion. There is some ambiguity concering Joab's motives for killing Abner and Amasa. It is possible that Joab had dual motives for killing Abner—to avenge his brother's death (2 Sam. 3:30) and to protect David from a potential threat (2 Sam. 3:24–25). The text offers both scenarios. The narrative also allows for numerous ironies which complicate an interpretation of this story. However, regardless of Joab's motives the explicit level of the text claims that Joab was not aware of Abner's private dealings with David. This would suggest that, in killing Abner, Joab is loyal to David. The situation with Amasa is similarly ambiguous. In 2 Samuel 17:25 it is clearly argued that Amasa is the commander in charge of the army who lead Absalom's revolt. In 2 Samuel 20:5 there is an implication that Amasa is a traitor as he takes a long time to immobilize an army against Sheba's rebellion. Thereby, leaving David vulnerable to Sheba's attack. When both of these scenarios are considered together—that of Amasa being the commander of Absalom's revolt against David and his delay in mobilizing an army to fight Sheba's rebellion against David—it would seem that David should be, at the very least, suspicious of Amasa.

Therefore, it is highly possible that Joab protected David from two army commanders who were traitors (2 Sam. 3:24–25; 17:25; 20:5). At the very least,

12 Translation from NJB.

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Joab's motives may be to do what is in the best interests of David. It may also be the case that to do what is in the best interests for David may also be in the best interests for Joab. This is consistent with Joab's motives throughout the SN in which Joab is inclined to do what is in the best interests for David's kingdom—sometimes in spite of David's foolishness. The implication that Joab is treated unfairly by David is heightened in the contrast with David's partial treatment of Barzillai. Certainly, Barzillai treated David loyally when he was in need by providing David with food (2:7), but David appears to be oblivious to the fact that it was Joab's act of killing Absalom (2 Sam. 18:14) that ended Absalom's revolt and saved David's life. Thus, we have three instances where Absalom has saved David from traitors (or in the case of Abner and Amasa, probable traitors).

The inclusion of Shimei suggests that there is a further dimension in David's testimony, namely, that David is concerned to ensure that Solomon's kingship is not called into question and that David's own legacy is not compromised. In particular, David is worried that it could become common knowledge that he, David, usurped the throne of Saul by recourse to murder and that, therefore, David's anointment as king was not the result of God's will. If this did become common knowledge then Solomon's right to the throne would be called into question. Since Shimei and Joab are in possession of this potentially dangerous knowledge, the implication is that David is advising Solomon to kill them. Therefore, this passage is best understood as David's instruction to Solomon to get rid of potential threats rather than as an instruction to follow the laws.

8.2.2 *1 Kings 2:15–17*

At the lower level Adonijah tells Bathsheba that she knew the kingdom was his, and that Israel expected him to reign. Furthermore, he tells Bathsheba that the kingdom has turned about and become his brother's (i.e. Solomon's) for it is the will of the Lord (2:15). Adonijah then requests that Bathsheba ask Solomon to give Abishag to Adonijah as his wife. Bathsheba agrees to speak to Solomon on Adonijah's behalf (2:16). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist, in the person of Adonijah, implies that he knows that Solomon's rise to the throne was not the will of the Lord but rather as a result of Bathsheba' scheming. The conflict is a direct opposition in the narrative. Adonijah says that he knows that Solomon attained the throne by the Lord, however, the message that is conveyed is that he knows that the Lord did not make Solomon king. The innocence in the narrative is the feigned ignorance of Adonijah. The object of ironic attack is Solomon's illegitimate or, at least, premature rise to the throne.

The grade of irony is covert and the mode of irony is impersonal. The subcategory of impersonal irony is pretended error of ignorance. Adonijah pretends that Solomon's claim to the throne was the Lord's making. The irony is

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detected in part by means of the language and the narrative context. As far as the language is concerned there are three main stages in Adonijah's comment which are as follows:

(1) Adonijah clearly indicates that he believes that the kingdom was rightly his.

ויאמר את ידעת כי־לי היתה המלוכה ועלי שׂמו כל־ישׂראל פניהם למלך (2:15a)
(He said, "You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel expected me to reign …)[13]

(2) Adonijah dissimulates and pretends that this was the working of the Lord whilst implying that he knows that Bathsheba is behind this.

ותסב המלוכה ותהי לאחי כי מיהוה היתה לו (2:15b)
(However, the kingdom has been turned over, and has become my brother's; for it was his from the LORD).[14]

(3) Adonijah requests that Bathsheba grant him his wish following on from his implicit message that he knows that Bathsheba was behind Solomon's enthronement. In other words, the implied message is, "I know that you are behind Solomon stealing the throne from me, therefore, the least you can do is fulfil my request."

ועתה שׁאלה אחת אנכי שׁאל מאתך אל־תּשׁבי את־פני (2:16)
(And now I am making one request of you; do not refuse me).[15]

The context clearly points to irony because Adonijah's actions are inconsistent with the explicit information in the narrative. To be more specific, Adonijah says that he knows that Solomon's rise to the throne was the work of the Lord, yet he is clearly trying to challenge the throne by taking the king's concubine (2:17). This would seem to discount the explicit text that Adonijah was accepting of Solomon's, supposedly, divinely appointed kingship.

8.2.3 *1 Kings 2:19–25*

At the lower level of the narrative Bathsheba goes to speak to Solomon on behalf of Adonijah and tells him that she has one small request (2:19–20a).

13 Translation from the NRS.
14 Translation from the NKJ.
15 Translation from the NAS.

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Solomon tells Bathsheba to make her request (2:20b). Bathsheba tells Solomon to give Abishag to Adonijah to be his wife (2:21). Solomon answers Bathsheba with the question, why does she ask this question, and why does she not ask for the kingdom for Adonijah? Solomon tells Bathsheba that Adonijah is his elder brother and says that she should ask for the kingdom for Adonijah on behalf of Zeruiah and Joab also (2:22). Solomon then swears on the Lord who has established him as king that Adonijah should be put to death (2:23–24). In verse 25 Benaiah kills Adonijah.

At the upper level of the narrative the implication is that Bathsheba's 'small' request is in fact a 'large' request. This is a direct opposition in the narrative that is largely confirmed by Solomon's anger.

> Solomon immediately sees through Bathsheba's question and Adonijah's intention. He latches onto the 'small' request—Abishag as wife for Adonijah—by asking why Bathsheba does not immediately come up with the 'big' request: the kingship for Adonijah! The ו before למה, according to Burney, has a sarcastic nuance. The same is true for the ו before the imperative שאלי, which conveys an aspect of irony.[16]

However, despite Solomon's shrewdness Solomon is the victim of irony as he gives reason why Adonijah should be king, notably because he is the elder brother (2:22), but then claims that his own kingship is the work of God (2:24). This kingship he begins with a contentious homicide. The irony in Bathsheba's comment and in Solomon's foolishness is innuendo. Therefore, the irony is covert and impersonal.

8.2.4 *1 Kings 2:26–27*

At the lower level of the narrative Solomon tells Abiathar that he deserves death but that he will not be put to death because he carried the ark and shared in David's hardships (2:26). Solomon stops Abiathar from being a priest (2:27). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Abiathar does not deserve death. This can be concluded because he merely endorsed the rightful heir to the throne, who did not meet any objections from David as he was preparing to be king (1:6). Therefore, the conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition. The mode of irony is impersonal and the sub-category of irony is Blaming in Order to Praise—(c) Inappropriate or irrelevant praise. In this manner the ironist, as the narrator of the story, blames Abiathar for supporting Adonijah (1 Kgs. 2:26). This is inappropriate blame as Adonijah was the rightful heir to

16 Martin J. Mulder, *I Kings*, 110.

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the throne. Furthermore, Abiathar is praised for his loyalty to David. This is irrelevant praise as the reason that Abiathar deserves to live is not because of his loyalty to David but instead because of his loyalty to the rightful King of Israel.

The narrator's mention of Abiathar's banishment as the fulfilment of the Lord's word to the house of Eli in Shiloh (2:27) is a further intentional untruth. Abiathar is a descendant of the priests of Nob, not the priests of Eli.[17] Thus the narrator, with a wink, suggests that Abiathar's exile is lawful and God ordained, when this could not be further from the truth. Instead, the truth in the narrative is that Solomon is corrupt and a dangerous and unjust despot. The grade of irony is covert and is discerned according to the background knowledge of the text.

8.2.5 *1 Kings 2:28–35*

At the lower level of the narrative Joab learns of Abiathar's expulsion and flees to the Lord's tent and grabs the horns of the altar (2:28). By convention, the significance of Joab grabbing the horns of the altar is that Joab is publically declaring his innocence and, in effect, calling for some formal process of adjudication. Moreover, Solomon ought to respect this convention, especially in cases where there is some doubt as to the guilt of the complainant, as there is with Joab. However, when Solomon is told that Joab has fled to the tent and is beside the altar holding its horns, Solomon orders Benaiah to kill him (2:29). Benaiah tells Joab that Solomon has commanded Joab to come out of the tent. Joab refuses to do so and tells Benaiah to kill him in the tent and Benaiah conveys this information to Solomon (2:30). Solomon now orders Benaiah to kill Joab at the altar to remove bloodguilt from the House of David (2:31). Solomon then goes on to say that Joab killed Abner and Amasa without David's knowledge (2:32). Benaiah kills Joab and is made general in Joab's place (2:34–35).

At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that it is Solomon who has blood on his head for the execution of Joab at the holy altar despite the insistence in the narrative that it is Joab who has guilt on *his* head (2:32–33). This is because Solomon refused to adhere to the convention to have Joab's actions formally adjudicated and, thereby, raised the suspicion that if there had been a judicial process Joab would not have been found guilty. As discussed previously, it would appear that Joab had some reason to believe that Abner and Amasa were both traitors. Therefore, the conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition. On the one hand, Solomon kills Joab ostensibly to remove bloodguilt from the House of David (2:32). On the other hand, in ordering Joab's execution at the holy altar without affording him due process, Soloman has

17 Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 29.

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defiled the altar, acted unjustly and, indeed, corruptly. His corruption consists in violating an important convention that serves justice and doing so out of self-interest. Therefore, Solomon brings bloodguilt onto the House of David in an unmitigated way.

The ironic content arises from the striking contrast between Solomon's emphatic announcement of the righteousness of his actions carried out with the purest of motives (to preserve the House of David) and the fact that his actions are unjust and probably motivated by self-interest. Here Solomon is obviously the object of ironic attack. Solomon is also the unknowing victim of irony in this passage as he is oblivious to the great offense he has committed against God and Israel. The mode of irony is impersonal. Furthermore, the sub-category of impersonal irony is irony displayed as the pejorative criticism of Solomon is conveyed by way of the ordering of the events (and the close confrontation of incompatibles). The grade of irony is covert as discerning the irony relies in part on background knowledge of the narrative. In particular, the background knowledge facilates our grasp of two major inconsistencies in the narrative: (1) Joab's loyalty to the House of David and Solomon's killing of Joab allegedly for treason, and (2) Solomon's supposedly sincere desire to free the House of David from bloodguilt, whilst ordering a profane and unjust act at the altar of God.[18]

As far as Joab's loyalty is concerned, Walsh argues, "The remark that Joab supported Adonijah but not Absalom reminds us that Joab's loyalty to David was unbroken, even during Absalom's rebellion … and Joab's support of the heir apparent simply continued his loyalty to the dynasty."[19] I have also argued that Joab's support of Adonijah was a display of support for the rightful heir of David. Therefore, Solomon's order for Benaiah to kill Joab is as unjust as David's order for Joab to instigate Uriah's death, and Absalom's order for his men to kill Amnon. This unjust killing of Joab, therefore, is a continuation of the series of unjust and unlawful acts in the House of David. Thus, by the end of the SN the abuse of authority by those within the monarchy is conclusively established and, indeed, is set to continue.

8.2.6 *Summary of Irony in 1 Kings 1:1–2:46*

David is ridiculed in a burlesque style of irony in 1 Kgs 1:1–4. There it is implied that he is impotent and powerless. In the following passage (1 Kgs. 1:5–10) it is implied in an innuendo that Adonijah is the rightful heir to the throne. In 1 Kings 1:11–35 David is the object of ironic attack as it becomes apparent

18 Jerome T. Walsh, *I Kings*, 57.

19 Ibid.

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that he is the reason that Solomon becomes the next king despite the knowledge that Adonijah is the rightful heir to the throne. Indeed, the ironic criticism in this passage is that David swears an oath that one son can be the king whilst not objecting to the preparations of another entitled son to be the king. In 1 Kings 1:36–37 there is an example of the ironic category of pretended agreement with the victim. Benaiah wishes that the decision for Solomon to be king be God-ordained while the ironist implies that the decision is not God-ordained. Far from it, David has decided who will be the succeeding king in the most unjust manner. In 1 Kings 2:1–9 David's 'testament' to Solomon is a parody of the idea that kings are righteous and obedient to the laws. In contrast to this David's 'testament' urges Solomon to break the law to settle David's scores and protect David's dynasty (including Solomon's kingship). The irony in 1 Kings 2:15–17, which is the pretended error of ignorance further implies that Adonijah is the rightful heir to the throne. This theme is continued in the form of an innuendo in 1 Kings 2:19–25. There Solomon himself implies that Adonijah is the rightful heir to the throne. The criticism continues in 1 Kings 2:26–27 when Solomon ruthlessly tells Abiathar that he deserves death when there is no justifiable reason in the narrative to support this claim. The irony in this instance is irrelevant or inappropriate praise. The irony in this chapter, and indeed the SN, concludes with unmitigated criticism of Solomon. In this section Solomon orders the unjust killing of Joab at the altar of God. This criticism is implied by way of irony displayed.

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CHAPTER 9

The Non-essential Elements of Satire

9.1 Introduction

I have demonstrated that the SN has a pervasive sense of irony and, indeed, of verbal irony. My application of Muecke's taxonomy of verbal irony to the SN revealed numerous important examples of verbal irony. This finding in itself is probably sufficient to demonstrate that the SN is a work of satire. However, to demonstrate with certainty that the SN is a work of satire it is necessary also to provide evidence of at least some of the other features of satire (i.e. other than verbal irony and an object of satirical attack). For the description of these additional features I rely on Marcus. Marcus' additional features of satire are as follows: fantastic events; grotesqueries; distortions; ridicule; parody; and/or rhetorical features. The SN has been mined for the presence of examples of these additional features of satire. These examples are listed below. Of note, some of the examples which have been listed could fit into more than one category. For instance, in 2 Samuel 12:30 David puts onto his head a crown which weighs the same as a person. This could be interpreted as a fantastic event since this is an impossible thing to do, or as a distortion since this is an exaggeration.

An issue arises with respect to one of these additional features of satire, namely, parody. Marcus has a description of parody. However, Muecke also has a description of parody. Their descriptions for the most converge. For example, both Marcus and Muecke hold that parody is primarily the distortion of a known text, expression or custom. However, Marcus' description of parody[1] differs in some respects from Muecke's. Marcus' description of parody includes puns, paronomasia, exaggeration and general mocking. By contrast, Muecke locates the latter phenomena outside his description of parody in stand-alone sub-categories of impersonal irony (at least in most cases.) The consequence of this for us is that one and the same example will be classified as parody by the light of Marcus' taxonomy but not necessarily by the lights of Muecke's. Therefore, the classification of some of the episodes mentioned below may involve a double description (one being Marcus', the other Muecke's). However, this classicatory anomaly does not signal substantive disagreement in respect of the episode classified. In any case, there are very few such cases. I emphasise

1 Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, 18.

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that all that is required from this section—in the context of my demonstration that the SN is a satire—is that there are elements of *some* of these features in the SN. For it is the pervasive sense of verbal irony that carries the burden of the argument that the SN is satire. Moreover, even if some of the more contentious examples are removed there would remain an overwhelming number of examples evidencing satire.

9.1.1 *Fantastic Events in the Succession Narrative*

Marcus writes that fantastic events are those events which are either impossible or highly improbable.[2]

12:30—David puts the crown which is the weight of a human being on his head. 14:26—the annual clippings of Absalom's hair are said to weigh four and a half pounds, which is inconceivable. The presence of God might be considered a fantastic event. 18:9—it might be considered to be a fantastic event that Absalom was hung in a tree by his head. In 19:18 it is claimed that Ziba split the Jordan and damned it up again in order to meet David.

9.1.2 *Grotesqueries*

Grostesqueries are defined by Marcus as actions which are characterised by violence, violations, or obscenities. Examples of grotesqueries are as follows, "… beatings, mutilations, killings, murder, rape, incest, and cannibalism, and vulgarities such as obscenity, and scatology.'[3]

11:4—it may be assumed that adultery is a grotesquery, as it is contrary to a stringent moral norm, and the punishment for this act is the death penalty. 11:5—if David defiles himself by sleeping with Bathsheba when she is in a state of ritual impurity, then this is a grotesquery. 11:8—David suggests that Uriah defile himself by sleeping with Bathsheba when Israel is at war. 11:14–15—David writes a note that Uriah is to be killed in fighting; David is attempting to cover-up his own transgression. 11:16–17—Uriah is killed, as are other innocent soldiers. 11:25—David's message to Joab that men die in war all the time is grotesque. 13:11—Amnon restrains Tamar. 13:14 Amnon rapes Tamar. 13:15–16—after raping Tamar, Amnon throws her out of the house, knowing that her life is ruined. 13:29—Amnon is executed on Absalom's command. 14:30—Absalom's decision to burn Joab's farm, might be considered a grotesquery since it is a violent act. The war itself is, of course, violent and, therefore, a grotesquery. 1 Kgs. 20:10—Joab kills Amasa. 1 Kgs. 2:5–6—David says that Joab should not

2 Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, 10.

3 Ibid., 11–12.

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go down to Sheol in peace. 1 Kgs. 2:7—David tells Solomon to send Shimei down to Sheol in blood. 1 Kgs. 2:25—Benaiah kills Adonijah. 1 Kgs. 2:34–35—Benaiah kills Joab, who is undeserving of death, at the holiest place in Israel.

9.1.3 *Distortions*

Marcus speaks of distortions as largely being exaggerations or understatements.[4]

9:1–10—David's mention of חסד is exaggerated. 9:10–13–9:10–13a is overstated and the information in 9:13b is curt. 11:1—there is an exaggeration in the verbosity in verse 11:1a and an understatement in 11:1b. 11:2–11:2a is prolix, and 11:2b is curt (when David spies Bathsheba). 11:3 there is an exaggeration in the messenger's response to David about Bathsheba's family. 11:4–5—the adultery with Bathsheba is spoken of in understated language. 11:11—there is an exaggeration in the vow that Uriah makes on David's name. 12:5–6—David's sentence placed on the rich man in the parable is exaggerated. 12:16–17—David's act of supplication after God's punishment is an exaggerated act. 12:27–28—the repetition of the word 'I' is exaggerated. 13:11–11a there is an overstatement in Tamar's language. 13:11b is curt. 13:16—there is an overstatement of Tamar's language. 13:18—the detail concerning Tamar's robe is overstated. 13:23–26a–13:23–25—Absalom uses overstated language, 13:26a is curt. 13:29—the language detailing Amnon's murder is understated. 13:30–33–13:30a*a*—is verbose language (David is told that his sons have been killed), 13:32a*b*—is curt, also 13:32b–33a is verbose, and 13:33b is curt. 13:34–36—is overstated (report that it is only Amnon who was killed). 14:9–11—the woman of Tekoa uses overstated language. 14:20—there is an overstatement in the woman of Tekoa's comment that David is all knowing. 14:22—Joab's actions are exaggerated. 14:25–26—the description of Absalom is overstated. 14:28–30a–there is verbosity in the description of the incident of Absalom setting fire to his property, 14:30b, the conciseness in the same episode is an indication of a distortion. 14:33—there is an understatement in David's reconciliation with Absalom. 14:33a prolix, and 14:33b curt. 15:7—the forty years that Absalom waited to ask David if he could go to Hebron is an exaggeration. 15:14—there is overstated language when David explains that his army must flee. 15:21—Ittai's response to David is overstated. 16:5–16:5a prolix, and 16:5b curt. (Shimei is cursing David) 17:8–13—Hushai's advice to Absalom is verbose. 18:13—the soldier response to Joab's bribe is overstated. 19:4–8a–there is overstatement in Joab's speech. 19:24—Mephibosheth's appearance is overstated.

4 Ibid., 13.

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9.1.4 *Ridicule*

Marcus claims that ridicule is making fun of a person by any means. This could take the form of making fun of a person's name, appearance, characteristics, or by concentrating on the embarrassing, and ignoble, situations which the protagonist finds himself/herself in.[5]

11:2—David is presented as a self-indulgent king who is more interested in taking a nap and looking at a beautiful woman than the war effort. 11:3 David is ridiculed in this verse since the messenger has to stress the high status and loyalty of Bathsheba's family members. 11:5—it might be ridiculing (of David) that Bathsheba falls pregnant to David through the act of adultery. 11:8—it is ignoble for David to bribe Uriah and suggest that he defile himself. 11:2–3—David's attempts to get Uriah drunk, so as to manipulate him into sleeping with Bathsheba, are ignoble. 11:14–15—the act of David sending Uriah with his own death warrant is ignoble. 11:16–17—the death of Uriah and the other innocent soldiers is ignoble. 12:7–15a–God's punishment of David ridicules David. 12:27–28—David must be told to take the town or Joab will name it after himself. 13:6–7—David is tricked by Amnon. 13:23–26—David is tricked by Absalom. 13:32b–33a Jonadab needs to tell David that it is only Amnon who has been killed. 13:34—Absalom flees Jerusalem. 14:4–7—David is tricked by the woman of Tekoa. 15:1—Absalom's entrance into Jerusalem with chariots and running men ridicules David. 15:3—The innuendo is that David is not competent to carry out his job as the administrator of justice. 14:4–6—ridicules Absalom because he has to steal the hearts of the Israelites. David is also ridiculed by his son. 15:7—David is tricked by Absalom into letting Absalom go to Hebron. 15:8—Absalom is ridiculed since he believes that God has brought him back to Jerusalem. 15:10—Absalom's erroneous claim that he is king ridicules both him and David. 15:11—it ridicules David that two hundred men went with Absalom. 15:11—it ridicules Absalom if he had to manipulate men to join his revolt, particularly given that Absalom believed that God blessed his actions. 15:14—David flees Jerusalem. 15:16—for David to leave the concubines behind to look after the house was foolish. 15:31—David's prayer for God to turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness appears to contradict David's acceptance of God's outcome. 16:5—David is cursed by Shimei who is a Saulide. 16:9—David allows himself to be cursed by Shimei. 16:10—David's suggestion that God has caused Shimei to curse David is foolish. 16:11–12 it is ridiculing that David allows Shimei to curse him. 16:18–19—Absalom is ridiculed by Hushai. 18:1–2a—David is ridiculed in his choice of leaders for his army. 18:9—it is ignoble that Absalom is hung by his head in a tree as his mule rides off.

5 Ibid., 18.

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18:11—Joab is ignoble in attempting to bribe the soldier. 1 Kgs. 1:1–4—David's impotence is a means of ridicule. 1 Kgs. 1:11–35—David is ridiculed because either he cannot remember making an oath to one son or because he knowingly endorses two sons to be king at the same time.

9.1.5 *Parody*

For Marcus, parody is primarily the distortion of a known text, expression, or custom. However, parody can also be discerned in puns, paronomasia, and exaggeration, or when an entire narrative, genre, person, or characteristic is mocked.[6]

11:11—Uriah is either a foreigner or of foreign descent. Thereby, it is a parody that he informs the King of Israel of the rules for ritual purity with respect to the presence of the ark in battle. 11:19–21—David is mocked in Joab's monologue about Abimelech, and in Joab's assertion that the death of Uriah will take away suspected anger. 12:6—David is mocked in Nathan's Parable, particularly when he sentences the rich man to death. 12:18b—the sarcastic remark which identifies David with banned, self-mutilating, mourning rituals, is parody. 12:19–20—David is mocked when David appears to mourn before the child dies, but does not mourn after the child's death. 12:22–23—David's response to the servants after the child's death is a distortion of the custom of mourning. 13:8–9—Amnon abuses the custom of hospitality. 13:23–26—Absalom uses a sheep-shearing festival as a means of ambushing Amnon thereby distorting a custom. 14:11—a foreigner (the wise woman of Tekoa) tricks the King of Israel into swearing an oath. 14:13—the woman of Tekoa tells David that he has convicted himself in giving his judgement since he has not returned Absalom to Jerusalem. 14:17—the woman of Tekoa tells David that his word is like the angel of God who discerns good and evil. 15:12—"Ahithophel", the name, means "my name is folly." 15:12—"Absalom", the name, means "my father is peace," yet in this passage he is waging war. 15:18—David's loyal men are mercenaries who sided with him, when he sought refuge with the Philistines. 15:24–29—returning the arc of the covenant to Jerusalem to act as a cover for his spy network is a parody. 16:3—parodies the monarchy, as David, Absalom, and Mephibosheth all believe that they are the rightful King of Israel. 16:4-David gives away Mephibosheth's estate without due process. 16:13–14—the story of David and Goliath is parodied in the story of Shimei pelting David and his army with stones. 16:20–23—Absalom's act of taking David's concubines means that he is now a rapist and has committed incest, just like Amnon. 16:20–23—arguably the laws are being mocked throughout this narrative.

6 Ibid., 19–22.

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17:1–4—Absalom's acceptance of Ahithophel's advice might be parodying David's earlier situation in 11:1. 17:5–7—In order to counter Ahithophel's advice Hushai must give poor tactical advice, but good advice regarding the expectations of the Israelites. Absalom provides Hushai with Ahithophel's advice. 18:14–17—Absalom is defeated by the same advice he chose not to follow. 1 Kgs. 2:1–9—the idea that kings are upright is parodied.

9.1.6 *Rhetorical Features*

Marcus writes that the rhetorical features which are particular to the Hebrew Bible include: paronomasia, repetitions of verbs, homophones, homographs, colloquialisms, obscene language, *hapax legomena,* and chiastic patterns.[7]

9:8—the term 'dead dog' is an example of obscene language. 11:1; 11;3; 11:4; 11;5; 11:6 (x3) 13:7 13:16—repetition of the verb send/sent. 11:11—the word סכות is the name of a town and also refers to the festival of booths, making this a (possible) homophone. 13:4b—the use of alliteration. 15:31—there is a repetition of speaking verbs in this verse. 16:1—the use of the metaphor מהראש. 16:5—the use of an unsuitable metaphor, בחורים, which means chosen, however, David is fleeing from Absalom who believes he too is chosen. 17:8–13—paronomasia of verbal roots and oppositions, metaphor, simile and alliteration.

9.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, there are a very large number of instances of the non-essential features of satire present throughout the SN. Thus, the SN meets the requirement of the presence of non-essential features of satire. It has already been demonstrated that the SN meets the primary requirements for it to be satire, namely, the presence of a pervasive sense of verbal irony and, therefore, an object of ironic and satirical attack. Accordingly, I conclude that the SN is a work of satire.

7 Ibid., 23.

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PART 3

Conclusions

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CHAPTER 10

The Genre Debate: 100 Years of the Succession Narrative

An examination of the irony in the SN revealed numerous important instances of verbal irony and, thus demonstrates a pervasive sense of irony. Verbal irony is the main type of irony used in satirical attacks. I conclude, therefore, that the SN is a satire. I note that this is consistent with the SN being a historically based narrative and with it having a primarily theological purpose. For although satire is a form of literary art it can, nevertheless, be based on actual events. Moreover, satire frequently serves a larger purpose, be that purpose political or, in the case of the SN, theological. This overall finding that the SN is a satire leads us into the genre debate. Therefore, in order to make a stronger argument for the SN as a work of satire, in this chapter I provide a comparative discussion of the various competing genres: satire; national epic; propaganda; wisdom literature; theological history; and literary art. I begin by providing an account of satire.

10.1 Satire

10.1.1 *Identifying Satire*

As already mentioned, the findings of this research demonstrate that the SN is a work of satire. As already discussed (1.2.1.2.), satire does not adhere to a strict form. For satire can take the form of an essay, a theatre production, a cartoon or, an entire narrative. However, in the case of a narrative, satire can be identified by its content. Moreover, satire has a clear object of attack.[1] This work has demonstrated that David is a clear object of attack and, indeed, the primary object of attack. It has also demonstrated that Absalom, Amnon, Solomon and some other members of the royal court are clear objects of attack. Furthermore, the object of satirical attack is usually a political or religious figure.[2] In this case, David is the King of Israel, which is both a political and a religious position. Moreover, the object of satirical attack is usually a real person,[3] as David was.

1 Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 14.
2 Hodgart, *Satire*, 189.
3 Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 14.

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This work has demonstrated that the SN has a pervasive sense of irony and, indeed, of verbal irony. The application of Muecke's taxonomy of verbal irony to the SN revealed numerous important examples of verbal irony. This finding in itself is probably sufficient to demonstrate that the SN is a work of satire. However, to demonstrate with certainty that the SN is a satire I have provided instances of the other features of satire including fantastic events;[4] grotesqueries;[5] distortions;[6] ridicule;[7] parody;[8] and/or rhetorical features.[9]

10.1.2 *Findings as They Relate to the Work of Other Scholars*

10.1.2.1 Early History of Interpretation

In this section I compare and contrast my findings, with reference to genre and the overall purpose of the SN, with the findings of scholars who contributed to the early study of the genre of this narrative, including, Wellhausen,[10] Luther,[11] Caspari,[12] Gressmann,[13] Schulz,[14] and Rost.[15]

My findings oppose Wellhausen's suggestion that the narrative from 2 Samuel 9–20–1 Kings 2 is simply history writing.[16] The irony in 2 Samuel 9–20–1 Kings 2 is too pronounced to support the claim that the documentation of history is the primary focus of the narrative. For the portrayal of David and the events in the SN is highly stylised and focused on the pejorative criticism of David rather than portraying a detailed and entirely accurate historical account of events. Moreover, Wellhasuen's claim that the narrative is pro-David[17] cannot be sustained, given my findings.

Luther's suggestion that the narrative in Second Samuel and First Kings is an example of novelistic writing[18] has some commonality with the findings of this research. Certainly, there is evidence that the narrative has been crafted to create a story with suspense, psychological tension, and a conflict around the

4 See 9.1.1.
5 See 9.1.2.
6 See 9.1.3.
7 See 9.1.4.
8 See 9.1.5.
9 See 9.1.6.
10 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*.
11 Luther, "The Novella of Judah and Tamar and Other Israelite Novellas."
12 Caspari, "The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15–20."
13 Gressmann, "The Oldest History Writing in Israel."
14 Schulz, "Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel."
15 Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*.
16 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 262.
17 Ibid., 294.
18 Luther, "The Novella of Judah and Tamar and Other Israelite Novellas," 13.

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central character. These features are features of satire and the novel. However, unlike novelistic writing, the primary purpose of a satire is not to create an entertaining story but rather to offer a critique of some aspect of society or, at least, of the protagonist of the story. My findings demonstrate that the SN is intended to heavily criticize David, Absalom, Amnon, Solomon and certain other members of the royal court in Israel. Contrary to what Luther claims, the SN is not complimentary to David. Luther claims that the juxtaposition of David's despotism and his faith[19] show the complexities of David's character as though this narrative is a biography of David. On the contrary, I suggest that the portrayal of David as a despot is quite simply done because the author believed that David was in fact a despot. Moreover, David is not shown to be particularly faithful. He does not adhere to the laws, he does not accept God's punishment without reservation (2 Sam. 12:22), he creates spy systems rather than trusting in God's favour (2 Sam. 15:24–29), and in the story of Shimei, although David mentions that Shimei's cursing is an act of God (2 Sam. 16:10), he later has Shimei murdered for this same act of cursing (1 Kgs. 2:8–9). Moreover, God is critical of David's behaviour (2 Sam. 11:27, 12:7–13). Luther's argument that this narrative has been crafted to highlight David's faith is therefore unsound. Nevertheless, Luther is arguably correct in claiming that ultimately God can be trusted because God punishes David.

My findings are congruent with Caspari's claim that the narrative is not history writing for the reasons that (a) the author was not objective in the material that he/she chose to include in the drama, and (b) the material is presented in a dramatized manner.[20] Caspari suggests that although the narrative in Second Samuel and First Kings has elements in common with the *novella*, it is more likely to be historiography.[21] The purpose of a satire is similar to that of a *novella*. Both genres reflect on past or present injustices in order to aid the progressive evolution of thought, and of institutions. However, satire is the more serious genre. Caspari suggests that this narrative is too serious to be a *novella* and, therefore, it should be regarded as historiography.[22] My findings support the conclusion that the SN is a more serious piece of writing than a *novella*. Nevertheless, it does not follow that it is historiography. Indeed, as has already been made clear, there are simply too many literary flourishes and, in particular, too much irony, for the claim that the SN is historiography to be persuasive. Rather the claim that the genre of the SN is satire is far more compelling.

19 Ibid., 101–106.

20 Caspari, "The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15–20," 68.

21 Ibid., 82–84.

22 Ibid.

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Gressmann's view on the genre of the SN (or, at least, the narrative which will later be called the SN) is not dissimilar to the views of Luther and Caspari. Gressmann's only departure from Luther and Caspari is his claim that there are elements of the narrative which conform to the genre of saga. An example of this is the story of Uriah carrying his own death note.[23] Although in the SN there is the presence of themes which are consistent with sagas, my findings undermine the proposition that the SN as a whole is a saga. For sagas are not normally heavily ironic.

Schulz argues that the material in Second Samuel and First Kings is mainly prose.[24] As previously noted, this suggestion is not inconsistent with a finding in favour of satire. Satire can exist within a work of prose, notwithstanding the presence of the satirical elements of verbal irony etc. Moreover, some of Schulz's claims about the artistic representations in the story apply to the genre of satire. For instance, repetitions, "heightening," "heightening and retardation" "comic relief," and "vividness,"[25] are consistent with satirical writing. However, Schulz's argument that the narrator was reluctant to pass judgement on David, for example, is not consistent with the notion of the SN as a work of satire. It is true that the author's judgement in a satire can be masked by the use of irony. For the ironist dissimulates and does not explicitly convey judgement, except in cases of overt irony. However, in a satire it is likely that there is explicit condemnation of the protagonist of the narrative at some point. In the SN David is explicitly criticized on a number of occasions, most notable by God (2 Sam. 12:7–14).

10.1.2.2 National Epic

I strongly oppose the classification of the SN as a national epic. The pejorative criticism of David, Absalom etc. inherent in the SN negates the view that this narrative was written in order to document the great achievements of the monarchy. Specifically, the SN is not a heroic portrayal of David. Pfeiffer confuses the historically known achievements of King David with the portrayal of David in the SN. Certainly, there is an argument that David was a successful statesman who united Israel and secured Israel's borders. However, regardless of these impressive feats, the author of the narrative is extremely critical of David as I have shown. Pfeiffer's claim that the author of the SN is usually objective and only biased in so much as he displays national pride,[26] is not

23 Gressmann, "The Oldest History Writing in Israel," 17–28.

24 Schulz, "Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel," 120–121.

25 Ibid., 147–158.

26 Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 357–358.

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persuasive. It would seem highly unlikely that the author of the SN was primarily motivated, or even strongly influenced, by national pride.

10.1.2.3 Propaganda

Thornton,[27] Hoffman,[28] McCarter,[29] and Whitelam[30] argue that the genre of the SN is propaganda. That the SN belongs to the genre of propaganda is in some ways supported by the findings of this research; specifically, it is supported if the propaganda is considered to be anti-David, Absalom, Amnon and Solomon. On the other hand, the proposition that the SN is pro-David propaganda is obviously false. As we have seen, this research demonstrates that the SN is highly critical of David, his sons Absalom Amnon and Solomon, and various other members of the royal court. Yet, even if the propaganda in question were to be considered to be anti-David, the view that the SN is propaganda is somewhat implausible. There are striking differences between propaganda and satire. Propaganda is largely explicit, and the criticism in satire largely covert or implicit. Since the criticism in the SN is in large part irony-based implicit criticism, the SN is more plausibly regarded as satire than propaganda.

Thornton's idea that the SN was written in order to show that Solomon was the rightful heir to the throne[31] warrants further discussion. Certainly, Solomon is spoken of as God's favoured son of David (2 Sam. 12:24). However, later in the narrative Adonijah is presented as the rightful heir to the throne and Solomon as an illegitimate king. Regardless of this, as stated, if the SN was propaganda, it would be more explicit and less ambiguous, and more inclined to direct statements than to dissimulation.[32] Thereby, satire is a stronger candidate for the genre of the SN, since satire while critical is also in large part, indirect.

Similarly, Hoffner takes the approach that this writing is a court apology which was written in order to legitimise Solomon's rise to the throne.[33] However, in order to accept this proposition, it is necessary to ignore the suspicious deaths of Adonijah, Joab and possibly Shimei. It is also worth noting Gunn's remark that Solomon is rarely spoken of in the SN. Therefore, it is plausible that the focus of the SN was David.[34] I argue that the salient function of the SN is to critique David in order to highlight the deficiencies of David's

27 Thornton, "Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings."
28 Hoffner, "Propaganda and Political Justification in Hittite Historiography."
29 McCarter Jr., "Plots, True or False:" The Succession Narrative as Court Apology."
30 Whitelam, "The Defence of David."
31 Thornton, "Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings," 160–161.
32 Gillian Keys, *Wages of Sin*, 22.
33 Hoffner, "Propaganda and Political Justification in Hittite Historiography," 49–62.
34 Gunn, *The Story of David*, 82.

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reign in and of themselves. To a lesser degree, the SN criticizes the reign of King Solomon.

McCarter's argument that the SN is propaganda serving to show Solomon as a decisive king and David as a gentle king is unlikely.[35] In order to make this latter suggestion plausible McCarter would have to ignore David's treatment of Uriah (2 Sam. 11:14) among others. Similarly, Whitelam's suggestion that the SN is a piece of royal propaganda which is designed to present the stability of David's kingdom[36] is questionable, given that David fled from Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15–16) and almost lost the kingdom to Absalom (2 Sam. 15–18). Moreover, arguably the SN is not pro-David propaganda since it does not give the impression that David was the innocent victim of Absalom's unstable behaviour, but rather that David was the cause of it.

10.1.2.4 Wisdom Literature

Whybray's suggestion that the SN was written as a teaching guide for students who were due to work in the royal court is intriguing.[37] There are certainly examples in this narrative which present as pedagogic. However, if this were to be the case, it would be expected that there would be clear and unambiguous outcomes in the narrative. More often the outcomes are unresolved. For instance, the story of Amnon and Tamar does not resolve the question as to the correct punishment for the rape of a sibling. Therefore, it is unlikely that SN could function as a guide to students in respect of the law. Moreover, the illustrations of wisdom are few and far between. For example, the putatively wise characters of Jonadab and the 'wise' woman of Tekoa do not prove to be wise at all but rather crafty and manipulative. Indeed, Ridout's claim that the instances of apparent wisdom in this narrative are actually ironic[38] is consistent with my findings.

Moreover, James Crenshaw argues that Whybray's conclusion is too broad. Crenshaw suggests that Whybray fails to identify style and ideas which are fundamentally of the wisdom tradition. Crenshaw argues that the theme of retribution is a staple of legal material, the motif of a controlling God is prominent in most biblical traditions, and the attitude to the cult in Proverbs is not dissimilar to the attitude to the cult in the prophetic tradition. Moreover, he remarks that ethical conduct, humility, and private prayer were as much a focus for the prophets and the priests as they were for the wisdom tradition.

35 McCarter Jr., "Plots, True or False." The Succession Narrative as Court Apology," 362–363.

36 Whitelam, "The Defence of David," 62.

37 Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2, 56*.

38 Ridout, "Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2)," 125–139.

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Crenshaw also points out that Whybray does not adequately explain why there are elements in the SN that are not familiar to the wisdom tradition, and why 'wisdom' is sometimes portrayed as manipulative.[39]

10.1.2.5 Theological 'History' Writing

Von Rad,[40] Brueggemann,[41] McKenzie,[42] and Mann[43] argue for the SN as belonging to a genre that is best described as theological 'hisotry' writing. For Von Rad, the SN was more than a story that documented the succession to the throne of David. He suggests that in addition to telling the story of the Davidic dynasty, the SN explicated how the new institution of the dynastic monarchy would operate. Thus, Von Rad highlights the historical nature of the writing.[44] In theological terms, Von Rad suggests that the SN is a history that not only speaks of the lives of the leaders, but embraces every aspect of life, both sacred and profane.[45] I argue that Von Rad's claim that the main purpose of the SN was to document history[46] is somewhat implausible, given the extent of the irony in the narrative.

Walter Brueggemann also suggests that the genre of the SN is historical/theological writing. In particular he maintains that the theme of succession in 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2 is theologically significant as it emphasises the working out of Yahweh's promise to David, and Israel.[47] The message of the narrative is then God's gift of life in the face of human freedom.[48] This freedom is distinct from a bond to religious conventions which Brueggemann suggests is contrasted with a charismatic experience of faith.[49] Thus, David's faith in God despite his humanness is the focus of this narrative.[50]

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39 J. L. Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature," *JBL* 88, no. 2 (1969), 129–142. 138–140.

40 Von Rad, "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel."

41 Brueggemann, "On Trust and Freedom: A Study of Faith in the Succession Narrative," and *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory*.

42 McKenzie, *King David. A Biography*.

43 Mann, *Run, David, Run! An Investigation of the Theological Speech Acts of David's Departure and Return* (*2 Samuel 14–20*).

44 Von Rad writes that historical writing is a product of the political changes of the day, as it is these changes which constitute what we understand as 'history.' Ibid., 145.

45 Ibid., 153.

46 Von Rad, "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel," 145.

47 Walter Brueggemann, "On Trust and Freedom: A Study of Faith in the Succession Narrative," *Int*, 26 (1972), 3–19, 4.

48 Ibid., 6.

49 Ibid., 7–8.

50 Ibid., 8. See also, Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 41–66.

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Brueggemann's claim that the SN displays a charismatic understanding of God and is not concerned with traditions[51] is also somewhat implausible, given the emphasis in the SN on the transgressions of David and others, and the disastrous consequences of these transgressions, notably David's punishment. David's alleged profound faith in God is also implausible, given that the occasions in the narrative which refer to David's faith present it as at best ambivalent, if not insincere (2 Sam. 12:18–21; 15:25; 33–37) and, indeed, ridicule David rather than praise him for this faith.

Steven Mann, who accepts Brueggemann's idea of David as a model of faith, suggests that the theme of sin and punishment is subordinate to the themes of David's faith in Yahweh, and David's hope for God's mercy.[52] Mann argues that the theme that Yahweh protects all Israelites and brings exiles home encourages, a "hermeneutic of self-involvement" from the audience.

Mann's claim that the theme of sin and punishment is subordinate to David's model faith in Yahweh[53] is diametrically opposed to my findings. Mann's claim is not plausible given that David's faith is evidently weak, used by David to manipulate others and/or misguided (2 Sam. 12:18–21; 15:25; 33–37). Moreover, the severe punishment of David's sins (2 Sam. 12:7–14), and the playing out of this punishment in terms of the death of Absalom etc., do not point to David's faith but instead to the problem of David's transgressions. Mann's theory that the SN, when considered as a theological tool encourages a "hermeneutic of self-involvement,"[54] is problematic as it is contingent upon the reader caring for David, and David caring for Yahweh. This is highly contestable given that David does not follow the laws, nor is David shown to be grateful to God (2 Sam. 12:8–9). Similarly, Mann's claim that this narrative is a narrative of hope is not persuasive in the sense that David is a model of faith. It may, however, be argued that the SN is a narrative of hope in so far as it points to the need for political, social, and theological reform. Such is the purpose of satire.

McKenzie's claim is that the SN is part of the Deuteronomistic History. McKenzie suggests that the latter is a theological history which sought to show the dangers of disobeying the laws, and which became instructive for later generations.[55] This view is highly plausible as far as it goes. Certainly, the SN portrays the dangers for the moral order of breaking the law, especially

51 Brueggemann, "On Trust and Freedom: A Study of Faith in the Succession Narrative," 7–8.

52 Steven T. Mann, *Run, David, Run! An Investigation of the Theological Speech Acts of David's Departure and Return* (*2 Samuel 14–20*) (Indiana: Eisenbrauns Inc., 2013), 7.

53 Mann, *Run, David, Run! An Investigation of the Theological Speech Acts of David's Departure and Return* (*2 Samuel 14–20*), 7.

54 Ibid., 158.

55 McKenzie, *King David. A Biography*, 27.

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by kings and other leaders. However, McKenzie has not focused on the ironic dimension of the SN, let alone characterised the SN as satire. However, my findings, namely, that the SN is a satire, are consistent with McKenzie's view of the SN as theological history. For the events depicted in the SN are historically based. Moreover, satire serves a purpose, and in the case of the SN, this purpose is theological.

10.1.2.6 Literary Art

My argument builds on the trajectory of thought that the SN is a work of literary art. The schoalrs of primary interest here are Eissfeldt,[56] and Gunn.[57] Otto Eissfeldt suggests that the SN outlines historical events, but does so in a way that is artistically crafted.[58] He proposes that the SN cannot be called history writing, as it does not document events as annals might, but rather presents events in a deliberate manner with much fictitious ornamentation.[59] Eissfeldt argues that the author of the SN could not have known the private details of the conversations between Amnon and Tamar, David and the woman from Tekoa, Absalom and Ahithophel, and Absalom and Hushai. In addition to these 'fantasies,' Eissfeldt remarks that the writer of the SN used a good deal of poetic licence in creating the story.[60]

The research in this thesis supports Eissfeldt's claim that the SN contains historical information combined with literary fantasy.[61] However, Eissfeldt does not mention irony when he speaks of literary fantasy, but rather focuses on private conversations. Nor does Eissfeldt characterise the SN as satire.

Gunn builds on these ideas by suggesting that the material in the SN is primarily a work of art and an entertaining story.[62] Gunn argues that this story is traditional in nature, drawing on motifs found in the OT and in other literature. Gunn's argument that the SN is a work of art and an entertaining story which is serious,[63] greatly influenced my research. Indeed, Gunn's view was the starting point for the development of my own view that the SN is a satire.

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56 Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction*.

57 Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*.

58 Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 143.

59 Ibid., 48.

60 Ibid., 141.

61 Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction*, 143.

62 Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*, 13. Although Gunn does use the term 'Succession Narrative,' it is worth noting that he does not believe that Solomon's ascension is the primary focus of this narrative; indeed, Gunn writes that Solomon is scarcely mentioned in the narrative. Instead Gunn views this as a narrative, where David is the protagonist of the story. 82.

63 Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*, 13.

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However, taking the SN as a work of satire means that I have diverged from Gunn's views. Gunn does recognise episodes of irony within the narrative.[64] However, Gunn does not argue that David is the principal object of sustained ironic attack in the SN by virtue largely of his moral transgressions. Instead Gunn argues that although David's behaviour raises some ethical questions, the SN does not moralise.[65] If Gunn is right then the irony in the SN is presumably merely observable irony rather than verbal irony. For observable irony does not necessarily involve authorial intention, let alone a moralising author. Contrary to Gunn's perspective, I interpret the SN from the perspective of verbal irony. Moreover, my findings include the proposition that the pejorative criticisms of David, Amnon, Absalom and Solomon are moral criticisms since they point to their moral failings. Despite this divergence of views, I owe a debt to Gunn's research, and to his long-standing conversation with Van Seters; specifically, to the argument that the SN is akin to the kind of writing which is found in *Njals Sagas*.

10.1.2.7 *Njals Saga*

The suggestion that the SN is a saga in the tradition of *Njals Sagas* is compatible with my findings. Van Seters' argument that the SN, or what he calls the 'David Saga,' is a fictitious account of history,[66] which subverts or satirizes an otherwise accepted account of history is in keeping with satire.[67] However, whereas, Van Seters suggests that the 'David Saga,' parodies an earlier document, my argument is that the SN offers a different perspective much in the same way as a political satirist today might. Parody is certainly an element of the findings of this research, but it is only one element amongst many. In any case, the existence of such an earlier document is contentious.

Van Seters' proposal that the material in SN is anti-monarchical[68] is supported by my findings. However, the findings of this research diverge decisively from Van Seters' views with respect to my claim that the genre of the SN is satire. Van Seters does not make this claim. Moreover, the elements of satire are different to the features of *Njals Sagas*; the latter are not always satirical in nature. I argue that the traditional features of satire, particularly verbal irony, pervade the SN.

64 Ibid., 45, 91, 93, 95, 97, 98, 100.
65 Ibid., 110.
66 Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David*, 43.
67 Ibid., 354–355.
68 Ibid., 358.

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10.2 Conclusion

It has been argued that there is a pervasive sense of verbal irony the SN and, therefore, an object of sustained ironic attack, primarily King David. Moreover, it has been argued that the SN contains multiple instances of the other elements of satire. These findings in themselves are sufficient to demonstrate that the SN is a satire. This argument has been strengthened by way of a comparison between the findings of my research (specifically, that the SN is a satire) and the alternative extant proposals in respect of the genre of the SN.

In relation to the early history of interpretation of the SN, the findings of this research contrast with Wellhausen's interpretation of the stories in the SN as history writing which is pro-David.[69] The caustic expression which is directed at David would seem to counter this argument. Luther's suggestion that this same writing is novelistic in style, and is concerned to show the complexities of David's character,[70] is also challenged by the interpretation of SN as satire. In particular, it has been argued that David is not portrayed as being as faithful as Luther suggests, and that David's despotism is emphasized more than Luther allows for. Caspari, on the other hand, argues that the narrative is too serious to be called a *novella* and that it is more akin to historiography.[71] An interpretation of satire is compatible with the degree of seriousness that Caspari was grasping for, and is indeed more serious than a historiography since satires call for reform. Similar comparisons are made with the work of Gressmann and Schulz.

Pfeiffer's argument that the SN is a national epic[72] is refuted by the findings of this research which show that David is not portrayed as a heroic king. As far as the genre of propaganda is concerned, the interpretation of the SN as satire compliments the thesis that the SN is anti-David, Absalom, and Amnon propaganda. Yet, although satire is similar to propaganda in some respects, it is also different. Specifically, satire seeks reform and a considered response from the audience, whereas propaganda does not encourage objectivity. The idea that the SN is pro-David propaganda is, therefore, refuted. It is similarly argued that the SN is too ambiguous to serve as a pedagogic resource in line with Whybray's argument that the SN is wisdom literature.[73]

69 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 105.
70 Luther, "The Novella of Judah and Tamar and Other Israelite Novellas," 101–106.
71 Caspari, "The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15–20," 82–84.
72 Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 357–358.
73 Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2*, 56.

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The idea that the SN is theological 'history' writing as has been argued by Von Rad, Brueggemann, McKenzie, and Mann, is compatible with the findings of this research, e.g. that David is criticised for not following the laws, and that the flow of events consists in the outworking of God's punishment of David. However, these theorists offer more benign interpretations than satire. This is evidenced by the findings of Brueggemann and Mann who interpret this narrative as portraying the strength of David's faith. On the other hand, my own interpretation of SN as satire suggests that the author of the SN is heavily critical of David's transgressions, and his lack of faith. My findings support the proposition that the broad genre to which the SN belongs is that of literary art, given the aesthetic quality of the narrative. Most saliently, this research supports Gunn's proposition that the SN is a serious work of art.[74] However, my own interpretation involves the common-sense acceptance of an author and, therefore, of authorial intention. Moreover, this author intends to be highly critical of David's moral transgressions. So, my interpretation of the SN differs from that of Gunn. Gunn argues that the SN is not a moral tale.[75] The findings of my research have the most in common with Van Seters' argument that the material in the SN is satirical.[76] However, whereas Van Seters suggests that this material is akin to a *njals saga,* according to my own interpretation the SN is a satire. I argue that the designation of satire is more precise than that of *njals sagas* since the latter are not always satirical in nature.

74 Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*, 13.
75 Ibid., 110.
76 Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David*, 354–355.

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CHAPTER 11

Findings

In this chapter I situate my findings of verbal irony in relation to the major scholars who have spoken of irony in the SN.

11.1 Verbal Irony

My primary aim has been to determine whether or not there is a pervasive sense of verbal irony in the SN and thus whether or not the SN is a satire. In order to achieve this aim Muecke's taxonomy of verbal irony was applied to the narrative in the SN. This taxonomy includes the three essential elements of irony: two levels in the narrative (explicit and implicit), an opposition between the levels, and the presence of innocence. Moreover, this taxonomy distinguishes the different grades of verbal irony, the different modes of verbal irony, and the sub-categories of impersonal irony (impersonal irony being one mode of verbal irony). This research has yielded new insights in relation to the SN. Moreover, the application of this taxonomy to this narrative has not been previously undertaken. In undertaking this task new insights have emerged regarding our understanding of important events depicted in the narrative, of major characters in this narrative, particularly David, and with regard to the genre debate.

This undertaking is based on the identification of verbal irony throughout the narrative. This has emerged from my systematic treatment of verbal irony in the narrative. Moreover, this is the first work to provide a thoroughgoing analysis of irony in the SN. The result is that irony has been found to be a pervasive feature of the narrative rather than merely to be present in a few isolated examples. Further the irony in question is verbal irony. Therefore, the irony is intended and the author is intentionally ironical. The presence of verbal irony indicates that the ironist is seeking to make the audience (presumably, including the Israelites) aware of the vices of the characters, notably David and later leaders of the Israelites. In so far as the audience is made aware by the ironist of these vices of the leaders and other characters, they are in a position, at least potentially, to correct these vices, especially if in some cases they recognise the vices in themselves. Of course, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is part of the point of verbal irony, and satire, to bring about the correction of vices. This being so,

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the SN has a moral purpose (albeit, in the case of the SN, within a theological framework).

11.1.1 *Verbal Irony: Situating the Findings of This Thesis*

The first major work to speak of irony in the Hebrew Bible comprehensively was Good's book, *Irony in the Old Testament*.[1] Good's findings of irony in the Book of Second Samuel are largely consistent with my findings (albeit Good does not discuss irony in the Book of Second Samuel at length). In his commentary, Good argues that the irony in 2 Samuel 11:1 (2 Sam. 11:1 being the primary focus of Good's discussion) is an example of implied irony as it is not immediately apparent.[2] This claim is consistent with my claim that the irony in 11:1 is covert irony, as covert irony is not immediately apparent. Yet, in relation to the interpretation of the ironic content of 2 Samuel 11:1 my findings go further than Good. For instance, Good makes the intuitive remark that it seems irregular, and therefore ironic, that David would remain in Jerusalem when it is usual for kings to go out to battle.[3] However, I provide an analysis of this episode based on Muecke's taxonomy. Thus, I emphasize the incongruity between David's action and the expectations that Israel had of her king and so on and so forth. My interpretation of 2 Samuel 11:1 is not reliant on the interpretation of מלאכים as 'kings' as Good's findings are. As discussed at length in my interpretation of 2 Samuel 11:1, there is a long-standing debate concerning the correct translation of מלאכים. However, Muecke's sub-category of impersonal irony, irony displayed (when applied to 2 Sam. 11:1) emphasizes the incongruity in *all* of Israel being at war, when David is not—as opposed to 'kings' being at war when David is not. The pejorative criticism in my interpretation is that David has broken a covenant he made with the Israelites. The implication of Good's interpretation is simply that David is not acting as other kings act.

Good also mentions Uriah's loyalty to David as being a case of irony, since his loyalty leads to his death. Similarly, my interpretation has identified this irony. However, in my research, the irony is identified by reference to Uriah's rhetorical question, the rhetorical question being a sub-category of impersonal, verbal irony. Yet, regardless of this difference, I agree that the irony in this section mentioned is pejoratively critical of David's behaviour. This finding supports Good's research which argues that the broad purpose of the irony in the story of David, Uriah, and Bathsheba is to imply that there is a difference between

1 Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*.

2 Ibid., 35–37.

3 Ibid.

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what David *is* doing as opposed to what he *ought* to be doing.[4] However, the findings of my research are more detailed than Good's findings, primarily as a result of my using Muecke's detailed taxonomy.

The differences in the findings of my research and Good's findings are as follows. Good mentions that Joab complies with David's command to kill Uriah.[5] This is partially correct as Joab does orchestrate Uriah's death, but he does not follow the instructions in David's letter entirely. Instead, Joab re-works David's plan and, as a result, more soldiers die (2 Sam. 11:16–17). My finding strengthens the pejorative criticism of David, since it is argued that not only is David ruthless, but he is also foolish. David's plan would have exposed David's crime to the entire army and thus thwarted his goal of concealing the crime. Moreover, my interpretation involves a criticism of Joab's moral character. For Joab is not only complicit in David's crime as a subordinate, but has a central initiating role in the cover-up of the crime, for it is his ingenuity that enables David's crimes to go undetected by the Israelites. However, despite Joab's complicity in David's cover-up, my interpretation suggests that David's request to put Uriah at the forefront of the heaviest fighting and to withdraw from him angers Joab. Joab reacts with exaggerated speech and rhetorical questions about Abimelech who was a corrupt king who ultimately lost his throne because of his misdeeds (2 Sam. 11:19–21). I argue that this section serves as a pejorative criticism of David since it implies that his kingdom is as corrupt as that of Abimelech's. Good's argument that Joab sent the news of Uriah's death to David in a casual manner[6] is thereby disputed. As I have argued, the seemingly casual mention by Joab of Uriah's death, which Good has interpreted as an after-thought, is only an after-thought at the lower and, therefore, explicit level of the narrative. At the upper and implicit level of the narrative the mention of Uriah's death is better understood as the ironic focus of the speech. The focus is on the pejorative criticism of David. This finding is in keeping with Perry and Sternberg's research that the emphasis in ironic speech is conveyed by the use of curt expression.

I also argue that David's response to Joab "… the sword devours now this one, now that one" (11:25) portrays David as the object of ironic attack. This is opposed to Good's suggestion that David's comment is a rationalization in order to calm his conscience which is bothering him.[7] Contrary to Good's suggestion, it would appear that David is not bothered by his actions. For David

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.

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needs to be told a parable which is analogous to his actions, and the explicit condemnation of Nathan/God to bring him to any awareness of his misdeeds (2 Sam. 12:1–13). My claim that David is not bothered by his action is in line with Good's comment, "The irony of the episode is, I think, evident. The incongruity between 'is' and 'ought' is perceptible to any reader from the beginning, but ironically it is not perceptible to David until he is told in plain language."[8]

However, by Good's own admission we should expect to find the odd error in his work. Consider the following statement in the introduction of the revised edition of his work, *Irony in the Old Testament*.

> When republication of this book was first proposed, I began to think of what I would like to change. It was soon clear that some of my changes of mind since 1965 would involve not merely touching up and referring to works that have appeared in the interim but completely rethinking and rewriting some parts. The upshot is that, save for the correction of a few errors, the text remains intact … I suspect that the flaws in the first chapter could be removed only by rewriting it. The issues in irony set out there still seem to me the right ones, though they could have been stated more cogently and illustrated more aptly.[9]

Whybray, writing about irony around the same time as Good, only refers to situations which he suggests are examples of dramatic irony.[10] According to Muecke, dramatic irony is irony which is revealed in events which are known to the audience but not known to characters.[11] This is in keeping with Whybray's examples of irony. However, Muecke also adds that dramatic irony is not usually focused on a single character, nor does dramatic irony moralise. Here we need to recall the distinction between moralising in the sense of merely passing informed moral judgements, and moralising in the sense of excessive, self-righteous moral criticism motivated by an unfounded sense of one's own moral superiority. It is moralising in the former sense that is at issue here (and in my argument more generally). In terms of the difference between dramatic and verbal irony, Muecke claims that the first difference is between saying, "isn't it ironic,"[12] in the case of dramatic irony, as opposed to a situation where an ironist is being deliberately ironical, in the case of verbal

8 Ibid.
9 Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (revised edition), 6.
10 Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2*, 46–47.
11 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 104.
12 Ibid., 42.

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irony.[13] The second difference for Muecke relies on the first one. It consists in the ironist passing moral judgment. This is a feature of verbal irony but not dramatic irony.

I have argued that the examples of irony that Whybray cites as dramatic irony have the features of an object of ironic attack and a moralising ironist behind the scenes. Therefore, these examples are instances of verbal irony. These examples are Nathan's Parable (2 Sam. 12:1–6), the story of the woman from Tekoa (2 Sam. 14:4–20), Amnon's request for Tamar to tend to him (2 Sam. 13:6–7), and Absalom's request that David allow Amnon to visit him at a sheep-shearing festival (2 Sam. 13:24–27).

Nathan's Parable might be interpreted as a case of dramatic irony on the grounds that while David is unaware that the parable is analogous to his own situation the reader knows that it is parallel. However, the presence of innocence, and a possible unknowing victim of irony, is a general requirement for all types of irony. However, whether or not an instance of irony is dramatic irony ("isn't it ironic")[14] as opposed to verbal irony ("the ironist being ironical")[15] depends, as we have seen, on the answers to the following questions. (1) Is there an object of ironic attack? and (2) Is there an ironist who deliberately moralises? If the answer to both of these questions is 'yes' then the irony is an example of verbal irony.

In the case of Nathan's Parable the object of ironic attack is clearly David. David is shown to be foolish for not recognizing the parable as being akin to his own situation, even culpably so—given he is a king and supposedly, therefore, wise. It is also evident that David is being morally criticized for his adultery with Bathsheba and for the execution of Uriah. This narrative content does not lend itself readily to the purely comedic purpose of dramatic irony. Instead, the king, who is meant to administer the laws, flouts the laws in the most egregious way. After all, we are talking about a murder and a deeply corrupt leader. Any comedy in this situation is the biting comedy of satire—a bitter comedy that makes us complicit in the condemnation by way of our own laughter. This is how the satirist shocks us into an awareness of what is going on around us. The moralising aspect of the narrative can persuasively be argued for, as the parable is focused on David's moral failings. Moreover, this episode is followed directly by God's punishment of David for his transgressions. Surely, this indicates that there is a moral purpose in this narrative. Therefore, it is preferable to categorise this passage as an instance of verbal irony rather than dramatic irony.

13 Ibid., 99–100.
14 Ibid., 42.
15 Ibid.

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The story of the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam. 14:4–20) is a complex story and is not as easy to pigeonhole as Nathan's Parable (2 Sam. 12:1–6). However, it is evident that David is the object of ironic attack, and it may be argued that the content of the parable is morally focused given that it concerns crimes in both the legal and moral senses. The implicit criticisms of David which arise in this episode include the suggestion that he does not make just adjudications, and that David is culpably unaware of what is going on around him. These moral failings of David have implications for all of Israel.

Whybray also suggests that dramatic irony can be found in the scene where David is tricked by Amnon (2 Sam. 13:6–7). As far as the case of Amnon and Tamar is concerned there is certainly a moral undertone. For Amnon rapes Tamar and this leads into a dialogue concerning morally-based social conventions and laws. The object of ironic attack in this episode is primarily Amnon—for raping his own sister. It may also be argued that David is the object of ironic attack as he culpably sends Tamar to tend to Amnon despite the sexual overtones in Amnon's request. David is similarly culpable, in allowing Absalom's request for Amnon to join him at the sheep-shearing festival (2 Sam. 13:24–27); Jonadab certainly implies this (2 Sam. 13:32). The consequence of David's obliviousness to Absalom's treachery is serious as it ultimately results in a civil war which is a morally horrendous outcome. Therefore, this example is best interpreted as an instance of verbal irony, and not dramatic irony.

Ridout's research findings, like Good's which he builds on, is more in line with my findings. In the first page of Ridout's discussion on irony, he makes a commitment to the "ironical man" who dissimulates in order to expose the pretensions of others.[16] According to Muecke the presence of an ironical man indicates a species of verbal irony. Furthermore, Ridout's findings in relation to "thematic irony," suggest that the irony is pervasive in the SN.[17] Similarly the findings of my research are of a pervasive and critical sense of irony in the SN. Yet, Ridout's definition of irony focuses solely on ironic themes, and uses only the notions of contrast and incongruity.[18] In my research, by contrast, I make use of Muecke's far more detailed taxonomy. As mentioned in the discussion on Good, the application of Muecke's more detailed taxonomy has afforded me a wider range of more specific findings. Of note, Ridout's methodology is in

16 Ridout, "Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Samuel 7, 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2)," 122.

17 Ibid., 125.

18 Ibid., 123.

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large part taken from Good's book, *Irony in the Old Testament.* As such Ridout's work has been compromised by the errors in Good's work.[19]

For Ridout the themes which show irony in the SN are; wisdom, fatherhood, kingship and loyalty.[20] Selected representative examples are discussed here. In reference to wisdom, Ridout argues that the primary irony to emerge in the story of Jonadab and Amnon, is that Jonadab is a wise man, yet his counsel is folly.[21] Since Ridout is arguing for an ironist being deliberately ironical, we should conclude from the above that the object of ironic attack is Jonadab, and that the moral criticism is that he is not wise when he is in a position which requires wisdom. This argument has merit. However, the difficulty with this interpretation is that Ridout rests on the disputed interpretation of חכם as wise instead of crafty. The word חכם may indicate craftiness or cleverness which is morally neutral. In this case, Jonadab is presented as cleverer than Amnon (2 Sam. 13:3–5), and also David (2 Sam. 13:32). However, Jonadab is not, thereby, presented as morally superior to Amnon and David. On the other hand, even if it is the case that Jonadab is thought to be lacking in moral integrity, the suggestion that the incongruity identified by Ridout is the focus of the narrative overlooks Amnon's and David's failings in this narrative. Surely, Amnon (and to a lesser extent David) is the focus of this narrative, and the object of ironic attack, as he rapes Tamar.

In the case of Ahithophel, Ridout claims that the irony emerges from the fact that although Ahithophel's advice was good advice Absalom did not take it.[22] The difficulty with this claim, as I have argued, is that Ahithophel's advice was not entirely good advice, as it contradicted the expectations that the Israelites had for their kings. The irony in the story of Ahithophel and Absalom needs to take into account the criticism in 2 Samuel 11:1 (which Ridout otherwise acknowledges)[23] that David does not lead the army out to war. When this is taken into account the irony in this story is revealed to have a more complex form, as I have discussed at length in Chapter 6.

Ridout claims that the primary irony in the story of the woman of Tekoa is that David only recognizes the correct course of action regarding his own son as a consequence of being tricked.[24] I dispute this claim. However, I strongly

19 Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (revised edition), 6.
20 Ibid., 124–125.
21 Ibid., 133.
22 Ibid., 133–134.
23 Ibid., 153.
24 Ibid., 138.

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agree with Ridout that David's transgressions are displayed in a parallel fashion to his sons.[25]

Ridout's conclusion emphasizes David's passivity as a sign of weakness,[26] rather than, as I argue, David's culpable failure to administer justice albeit in difficult cases. However, I support Ridout's suggestion that the irony in the SN portrays David as a poor king.[27]

Perry and Sternberg's research into irony in the story of David and Bathsheba has influenced my argument. I have used their findings on the phenomenon of a pattern of prolix followed by curt language indicating irony. However, my own research project has taken a different approach to that of Perry and Sternberg. The latter have argued for (i) *The Twofold Hypothesis,* concerning what Uriah knew of David's encounter with Bathsheba,[28] and; (ii) *The Three-Way Hypothesis,* which concerns what David thinks that Uriah knows.[29] This concentration on the beliefs of the characters is a unique and valuable contribution to scholarship. However, the *Twofold* and *Three-way Hypotheses* have no bearing on my findings. For I maintain that the major issue in the story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba is the incompatibility between David, the King of Israel's, responsibility to uphold the law and his actual behaviour of breaking the law with confident abandon. Whether or not Uriah knows that David has slept with Bathsheba, or whether or not David has any knowledge that Uriah knows this, does not change the pejorative criticism of David in the text. This criticism is emphasized by way of verbal irony.

Bar-Efrat argues that the irony in the SN is dramatic irony, and not verbal irony, because the characters are unwitting in their irony and instead it is the author who creates the irony.[30] While dramatic irony is a species of observable irony this claim of Efrat can be challenged. For it is not a necessary condition of verbal irony that the characters intend the irony, perhaps the narrator or the author intends the irony. Bar-Efrat argues that Uriah's statement in 2 Samuel 11:11 is not verbal irony as Uriah cannot be sure of the pejorative criticism implicit in his words and, therefore, cannot have intended this criticism. However, as we have just seen, this is not to the point. Furthermore, Bar-Efrat speaks of the rhetorical question in this verse,[31] which he later suggests is an

25 Ibid., 142–143.
26 Ibid., 152.
27 Ibid., 152.
28 Perry and Sternberg, "The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process," 292.
29 Ibid., 300.
30 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 125.
31 Ibid., 126.

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example of the oppositional element of verbal irony.[32] In effect, this contradicts his earlier claim that the verse does not contain verbal irony. On first analysis it might appear that this example could be either verbal irony or dramatic irony. However, given that it occurs in the context of a sustained attack against David, it is far more likely to be verbal irony. Other examples of irony which are cited by Bar-Efrat and deemed to be dramatic irony are as follows: 2 Samuel 11:14–15; 11:21; 12:5–6; 15:9;[33] 13:25–27; 18:17–18; 18:27; and 1 Kings 1:42. In all of these instances Bar-Efrat notes that there is an element of pejorative criticism. For example, in the case of Uriah, he argues, "The irony seems to indicate that not only did David sin, but that he did so with unmitigated cynicism."[34] Given the elements of pejorative criticism in these examples and, therefore, the existence of objects of ironic attack, they are also more likely to be instances of verbal irony than dramatic irony.

Carolyn Sharp concludes that the prevalence of irony in connection with power suggests that power is a subject that lends itself easily to irony.[35] In connection with David, Sharp writes that the overarching framework of irony within the SN has as its premise that, on the one hand, Israel was under the faithful supervision of God and, on the other hand, Israel was under the questionable leadership of David.[36] She suggests that the incongruities in the Davidic stories represent the contradictions within Israelite society.[37] She further suggests that there is a tension between David's extreme devotion to Yahweh and David's self-serving actions.[38] Sharp also sees irony in the image of Uriah speaking to David and ardently refusing to sleep with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:11) when David has already slept with her (2 Sam. 11:4).[39] Moreover, Sharp writes of the satirical implications of the parallel between the story of Judah and Tamar, on the one hand, and David and Bathsheba, on the other, and in particular the ironic perspective which comes from David's lineage. For instance, she writes, "David is a disaster of a leader, illegitimate and ethnically an outsider (given that Tamar may be a Canaanite and Ruth is a Moabite)."[40] I have not explored this avenue and I do not dispute the existence of this irony. Certainly, Sharp's general findings in respect of David are in keeping with my findings.

32 Ibid., 210.
33 Ibid., 127.
34 Ibid., 127.
35 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 45.
36 Ibid., 47.
37 Ibid., 47–48.
38 Ibid., 245.
39 Ibid., 245.
40 Ibid., 96.

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> While it is possible that the rhetorical motivations for such a story linking Tamar to David are supportive of the Davidide monarchy, it seems more likely that this odd and embarrassing story yields devastating satirical implications. The unspoken here? A minor point may be that just like Judah, David foolishly risks everything for the fulfilment of his own sexual needs (with Bathsheba). Robert Alter's label of Genesis 38 as "a tale of exposure through sexual incontinence" can certainly be applied to the Bathsheba affair as well. A more far-reaching ironic perspective might be sketched as follows. David is a disaster as a leader, illegitimate and ethnically an outsider (given that Tamar may be Canaanite and Ruth is Moabite).[41]

Elsewhere I have applied Muecke's general definition of irony to 2 Samuel 11–14. I suggested that an ironic interpretation of these passages shows that although David's relationship with God was not meritorious (as opposed to his relationship with Israel), God still expected David to behave in accordance with moral laws.[42] As a consequence of writing this paper I decided that a more nuanced interpretation could be found by applying a more specific and detailed methodology which is the methodology deployed in this book.

In a further paper I have argued that irony is used in the story of David and Bathsheba to soften criticism,[43] as per Dews, Kaplan and Winner's research into what they refer to as the social function of irony.[44] The social function in question is essentially that of maintaining civility in social exchanges. I note that irony used to soften criticism, even if intended irony, is not verbal irony as defined by Muecke since it does not necessarily involve pejorative criticism. My paper applied this socio-psychological perspective on irony to the story of David and Bathsheba. I now believe this application to have limited utility and that a more sophisticated analysis of the SN can be obtained by means of the methodology proposed in this book.

This section will not discuss scholars who have only mentioned irony in the SN in passing, including, Gunn,[45] Brueggemann,[46] Gunn and Fewell,[47] McKenzie,[48] and Van Seters.[49]

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41 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, 96.

42 Ingram, "David Remains in Jerusalem and Absalom Flees to Geshur: An Ironic Interpretation," 215.

43 Ingram, "The Kindness of Irony: A Psychological Look at Irony in 2 Samuel 11," 269–285.

44 Shelly Dews, Joan Kaplan, and Ellen Winner, "Why Not Say it Directly? The Social Functions of Irony," *Discourse Processes* 19, no. 3 (1995), 347–367, 347.

45 Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 45, 91, 93, 95, 97, 98 & 100.

46 Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination & Memory*, 50, 58, 60, 62.

47 Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible, 61* & 74.

48 McKenzie, *King David. A Biography*, 158, 159, 160, 164 & 183.

49 Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David*, 308, 312, 322, & 358.

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11.1.2 *The Significance of Verbal Irony in the Succession Narrative*

If a literary work contains verbal irony then there must be an ironist, or in other words, a character, a narrator or an author who is being ironical. If a literary work has a pervasive sense of verbal irony then—assuming also the presence of some other elements of satire—the literary work is a satire. Since the SN meets these conditions it is a satire. Moreover, the primary ironist is also a satirist and, of course, there is an object of ironic attack, be that a person(s) or an idea of whatever.

In reference to Highet's argument that satirists are either optimists or pessimists,[50] it must be argued that the author of the SN is an optimist. For the criticism of David and others in the SN indicates that the author was alarmed by the corruption in the monarchy, yet, had faith that God was a higher authority than the king and could put things right. To be more specific the satirist was critical of David, Amnon, Absalom, Solomon and to a lesser extent, Joab and other members of the royal court.

If the satirist is an optimist, then it can be inferred that the satirist hoped for the correction of the vices satirised. We might then imagine that the satirist in the SN hoped for the correction of the vices; indeed, a correction in line with the moral order, and in particular, God's laws. Importantly, the SN indicates that there are consequences for moral transgressions—consequences which go beyond personal suffering; in the case of David's transgressions, all of Israel had to suffer a war. Furthermore, the satirist emphasizes that it is the action of the king to administer the laws in a just manner, and to preserve the moral order. If the king fails to do this, everybody suffers. Indeed, the security of Israel may be at risk. Most importantly, the satirist emphasizes that God is the author of the moral laws, and that the king's job is merely to impartially administer these laws.

Therefore, according to the satirist author of the SN, the model king was a king who complied with the God-given laws of Israel, ensured that others complied with these laws, and exercised good and impartial judgement in the administration of these laws. Moreover, this model king was a paragon of faith. Indeed, faith in God and conscientious upholding of God's laws worked hand in glove. Interestingly, David is generally accepted to be a paragon of faith. However, the satirist of the SN strongly implies that this view is mistaken as David is presented as a foolish transgressor of God's laws and lacking in faith. Given that the primary purpose of satire is reform, it may then be argued that the author of the SN sought reform in the monarchy of Israel and did so in the context of an overall theological framework. Thus, the satirist implies that the ideal King of Israel would be recognized by his faith in God, and good and

50 Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 19.

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impartial judgement in respect of the laws of Israel, and conversely that a poor king can be recognised by his lack of faith in God and disregard for the laws of Israel. These findings are applicable to David's reign and the reign of subsequent kings of Israel.

When the SN is not considered as a satire, and the narrative is understood to be straight-forward and not ironic, immoral actions can be understood as acceptable or tolerable. For instance, if the SN is thought to be a national epic David's transgressions must be viewed favourably as being Machiavellian or at the least excuseable given the many achievements of David's reign. Similarly, if the focus of the narrative is interpreted as David's faith in God despite, what Brueggemann calls, David's "humanness" then we could imagine that David is a figure to be emulated, or at the very least his transgressions are down-played. These latter views undervalue the perspective of oppressed people, or people who are protected by the laws that David disregards.

Satire on the other hand exposes corruption and calls for reform whether that be at the time of writing or a general call to reform injustice across time. As mentioned earlier we cannot know whether the SN was written in the time of David or in a later period. However, we can know that the narrative was pejoratively critical of David and his sons (see characterisations below). Furthermore, we can assume that the author/authors of this biblical narrative would be critical of those who endorsed a view of leadership that was modelled on King David as he is presented in the SN. Therefore, given that the author/authors of this biblical narrative were critical of King David for being a corrupt leader, and assuming that, for instance, Israels' current prime-minister Benjamin Netanyahu is ultimately found to be guilty of the charges on which he has been indicted, i.e. bribery, fraud and breach of trust, then it follows that the author/authors of the biblical narrative would be critical of Netanyahu for being a corrupt leader.

It is common for Israel's leaders to be compared to King David and Benjamin Netanyahu is no exception. In as much as King David unified Israel and had a long reign these comparisons would seem to be favourable to Israel's leaders. Moreover, there is also a tendency for Israel's leaders' misdeeds to be excused by comparing their misdeeds to King David's transgressions and claiming that although Kind David transgressed, he was still in God's favour. The implication is that the misdeeds of Israel's leaders are morally acceptable and should be forgiven. The view of King David upon which this manoeuvre depends is, as we have seen, the one endorsed by Brueggemann. Take the following well-known examples of Netanyahu's misdeeds being minimised by means of a comparison to a morally exonerated King David. "Israelis concede that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not squeaky-clean, but wonder whether he,

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like King David, be forgiven his misdeeds."[51] Or, "As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces an indictment that threatens to cut short his long and illustrious term leading the nation of Israel, some see parallels between Netanyahu and King David, who both face opposition and temptation in their challenging roles as the "kings" of Israel."[52] This tendency to minimise the damage wrought by moral failings in Israel's leaders past and present, and indeed any other corrupt leaders, is contrary to the view expressed in the SN. Indeed, in this narrative the moral transgressions of David and his family members are analysed and pejoratively criticised in great detail. For the author/authors of the SN make it clear that leaders are expected to obey the laws and that leaders have a special responsibility to ensure that laws are upheld. Furthermore, crimes such as bribery, fraud and breach of trust need to be seen for what they are, that is, as crimes, and not merely the understandable and inevitable consequence of the temptations of a challenging leadership role, or in other words, excusable actions. In short, the significance of my analysis of the SN by recourse to its pervasive sense of irony is not simply its significance in terms of our understanding of a central biblical narrative but also its implications for understanding and assessing political leadership, notably Israeli political leaders, in the contemporary world.

In order to create overall characterisations of David and his sons, especially with respect to their moral character, I have listed their transgressions, large and small. The following are characterisations which have emerged as a result of considering the narrative in terms of verbal irony. These characterisations are grouped together under the headings of the main characters in the narrative who are the subject of satirical attack. These characters are David, Amnon, Absalom, and Solomon.

11.2 Characterisations from a Consideration of the Text in Terms of Verbal Irony

Various different criticisms of the characters in the SN have emerged in my argument. These criticisms arise as a result of taking the ironic perspective;

51 Aviel Schneider, "Is Netanyahu God's Servant?" In, *Israel Today*. Monday March 4, 2019. Accessed 1st April, 2019. http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/36095/Default.aspx

52 Adam Elyiahu Berkowitz, "In Lastest Attempts to Bring Down Bibi, Rabbi Sees Biblical Parrallels Between Netanyahu, King David". In, *Breaking Israel News*. August 9, 2007. Accessed 1st April, 2019. https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/92942/netanyahu-faces-trials-predecessor-king-david-enemies-media-seek-destroy/

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specifically, the perspective of verbal irony. The characters, notably David, are the objects of frequent ironic attack at the hands of the ironist, be the ironist the author, the narrator or another character in the text. When these criticisms are grouped together, they point to a certain pervasive critical tone in the SN. This critical tone emerges from the ironist's ongoing, irony-based pejorative criticism of central characters in the narrative.

It is worth noting at this point that some instances of criticism are made exclusively through irony and, therefore, the criticism is only implied. However, in other cases the irony merely adds an emphasis to the criticism which is already explicit or otherwise transparent. All the identified instances of both kinds of irony-based criticism have been collected in this section. This has been done in order to establish those characterisations in the narrative which depend upon verbal irony. For more in-depth accounts of the instances of irony referred to in this chapter please refer to relevant sections in the body of the book; i.e. the sections corresponding to the verse numbers in the characterisations.

11.2.1 *David*

This inquiry has as a main focus the character of David. As has already been discussed David is variously interpreted to be a character who is heroic, a character who is criticised, and a character who is shown to be flawed but 'human' and ultimately redeemed. The result of this inquiry is as follows. David has been found to be a character with many vices. Sometimes he acts in cold indifference, sometimes he is portrayed as being foolish and easily manipulated, at other times he is shown to be the manipulator and oppressor. It must also be added that David is portrayed as a character who repents and maintains a relationship with God. Yet, David's acts of repentance are few and far between, do not issue in a change in his behaviour, and his relationship with God is marred by misunderstandings and a flagrant disregard of the laws. David's character is discussed under the following headings: David as a king, David as a transgressor, David as a fool, David as a danger to others, David and justice, David as a corrupt politician, David and God, and Suspicious events in David's history.

11.2.1.1 David as a King

As far as the findings of this research are concerned, the most salient criticism of David in his role as a king is that he does not live up to reasonable expectations. The irony in the SN emphasizes David's failings as a king. This section can be divided under two major headings: David does not live up to the expectations that the Israelites have of him, and David does not live up to God's expectations of a king.

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11.2.1.2 David Does not Live Up to the Expectations that the Israelites Have of Him

In 11:1 the mode of irony displayed emphasizes the pejorative criticism that David does not lead the Israelites out to war as a king should. In 12:27–8 there is an instance of pretended advice. It involves Joab's pretended advice to David (the victim of ironic attack) that he will name the city of waters after himself if David does not join the battle. In a move that discounts the argument that David could not lead his men out to war, David rides out to the battle and takes the city in an unacceptable manner, including taking the spoils of war. This pejorative criticism is emphasised by the use of overstatement (12:29–31). In 15:14 David flees Jerusalem, which is contrary to the expectation that the Israelites had that David would lead them in battle and be a warrior king. In this verse the irony emerges in the style of low-burlesque. In 18:3 David is persuaded not to lead his men out to war, despite this being the reason why he was anointed as a king in the first place. This criticism emerges by way of an insinuation. In 19:1–3 David grieves for Absalom instead of receiving the troops, in a case of irony displayed. In 19:4–8 Joab tells David, in overstated language, to go out and receive the soldiers.

11.2.1.3 David Does not Live Up to God's Expectations of a King

David's major affront to God lies in the fact that he regularly breaks God's laws. These instances are spoken of ironically and will be discussed under the next heading, "David as a transgressor." However, the clearest indication that David does not live up to God's expectations is found in 12:7–14 where God explicitly condemns David.

11.2.1.4 David as a Transgressor

David's transgressions can be divided into three different categories which are as follows: David is unequivocally guilty of breaking a law, David is guilty of breaking a social convention, and David does not break a law yet is punished by God. In the following cases the irony is used in different ways. Either the transgressions are spoken of ironically, or the irony brings the transgression to light.

11.2.1.5 David Is Unequivocally Guilty of Breaking a Law

In 11:3 David is guilty of coveting another man's wife. This event is criticized in a rhetorical question. Furthermore, David commits adultery (11:4), and the criticism of this event emerges in the form of understatement. David takes the spoils of war in Rabbah (12:30–31). This is subjected to ironic criticism by way of an overstatement.

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11.2.1.6 David Is Guilty of Flouting a Social Convention

In order to cover up his transgression David withdraws Uriah from the war and tries to coerce Uriah into sleeping with Bathsheba, including leaving a 'present' for Uriah (11:6–8). It is implied that this gift is a bribe. This implication is that David attempts to manipulate Uriah contrary to the laws. This manipulation is communicated by way of irony displayed. In 11:11 by means of a rhetorical question Uriah criticizes David in relation to David's suggestion that Uriah sleep with Bathsheba when all of Israel are at battle with the ark. If Uriah were to do as David suggested he would violate the rules of ritual purity which soldiers were expected to uphold. This makes David's previous insistence on strict ritual purity for soldiers suspicious (1 Sam. 21:5). Regardless of Uriah's protestations, and the fact that Uriah reminded David of the rules of holy war, David invites Uriah to a feast and tries to weaken Uriah's resolve so that he will sleep with Bathsheba. This is another example of irony displayed (11:13). In 15:24–29 David sends the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem with two priests in order to create a spy network. The irony in this criticism is a rhetorical question. In 1 Kings 2:1–9 David gives a cynical testament as a king.

11.2.1.7 David Does not Break a Law, Yet Is Punished by God

In 11:15 David sends Uriah back to battle with his own death-note, because David could not corrupt Uriah. It may be argued that David does not break a law in this instance since David does not kill Uriah personally. However, David's sin is confirmed by God's punishment (12:10). This section is an example of irony displayed. This decision not only resulted in Uriah's death but also claimed the lives of a number of other loyal soldiers (11:17). Joab reacted to all this with a scathing rhetorical question (11:18–21).

11.2.1.8 David as a Fool

In the preceding sections David does not live up to the expectations that the Israelites and God had of David, and David proves to be guilty of a number of different transgressions. David is also portrayed as a fool. This section will concentrate on the instances where verbal irony has portrayed David as being particularly idiotic. The ways in which David is shown to be a fool are as follows: David's acts of stupidity; David is spoken to in a parable and misses the point of the parable; David is tricked by various people; and David is not in tune with those around him.

11.2.1.9 David's Acts of Stupidity

This section is focused on particular instances where David is shown to be foolish in light of what a reasonable person would be expected to understand or do. David's plan to cover-up his transgressions as manifest in Uriah's death note is

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unworkable and, therefore, shows David to be a fool. This is a case of irony displayed (11:15). Thus, if Joab were to put Uriah in the front of heavy fighting and order the troops to withdraw from him, the troops would know that Uriah was being killed intentionally. Joab's rhetorical question, which alludes to corrupt kings, points to this stupidity (11:18–21). Another act of stupidity by David is his decision to leave ten concubines behind in Jerusalem to look after the palace while he flees (15:16). This stupidity was conveyed by means of irony displayed. David knew that it was customary for a challenger to the throne to take a king's concubines and usurp his position, as this was what David did to Saul. David also proves himself to be a fool when he argues that God would turn Shimei's curse to good, despite this being contrary to the laws (16:11–12). The narration of this event involves the ironic mode of parody. David endorses Solomon to be king when he has otherwise not objected to Adonijah's preparations to be king (1 Kgs. 1:11–35).

11.2.1.10 David Is Told a Parable and Misses the Point of the Parable

In 12:1–6 David is oblivious that the parable he is told is analogous to his own situation. The ironic content of this instance of the sub-category of irony by analogy consists of pejorative, indeed scathing, criticism of the actions of the character who represents David. In 12:5–6 David orders that the character who he is analogous to be put to death. This criticism also involves ironic overstatement.

11.2.1.11 David Is Tricked by Various People

In 13:6 David is tricked by Amnon. In 13:7 the irony continues on from 13:6 and is best described as pretended defence of the victim. Here David is portrayed as a fool who could not see through a ruse which the ordinary person would penetrate. In 13:23–27 David is manipulated by another son, Absalom. Absalom tricks David into sending Amnon to be ambushed and killed (13:28). The insinuation in this narrative, namely, that Amnon is to be executed, is missed entirely by David. David is then tricked by the woman of Tekoa, working in collaboration with Joab, into taking on the guilt of Absalom's transgression. Her speech uses overstated language (14:11). David is also tricked into swearing an oath to enable Absalom's return to Jerusalem (14:13). This time the woman of Tekoa makes use of a rhetorical question. In 14:23 Joab uses inappropriate praise to get David to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem (14:23). This is not the best course of action to take, as it means that Absalom is not punished for his role in Amnon's death. David is tricked once again by Absalom. This time David is tricked into allowing Absalom to make a vow to Yahweh in Hebron (15:7), despite the dangers of allowing him to do so (15:8). The sub-category of irony is an insinuation. The narrative in 19:24 would suggest that Ziba had

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previously tricked David into giving him Mephibosheth's estate. It may be the case that Nathan and Bathsheba trick David into swearing an oath to make Solomon king in 1 Kings 1:11–35.

11.2.1.12 David Is not in Tune with Those Around Him

David appears to be oblivious to Absalom's anger. Indeed, Jonadab has to tell David why Absalom has arranged Amnon's murder (13:32–33). The irony in this section contrasts Jonadab's wisdom with David's foolishness. In 14:15–17 the woman of Tekoa tells David that he is wise and all-knowing. This is an ironic statement, which makes use of the sub-category of impersonal irony praise in order to blame.

11.2.1.13 David as a Danger to Others

David's foolishness has profoundly harmful effects on individuals and the community. So too does David's immoral and unlawful decisions. These harmful effects will be outlined under the headings, David as a danger to his troops, and David as a danger to his family.

11.2.1.14 David as a Danger to His Troops

David is guilty of coveting another man's wife. In particular David is guilty of coveting a woman who is the wife of an esteemed soldier, and the daughter of one of David's elite soldiers. Notably, both of these men are at war (11:3). This criticism arises from the rhetorical question the messenger addresses to David. In 11:15 David sends Uriah back to battle with his own death-note. David is seeking to kill Uriah because he could not corrupt him. The pejorative criticism in this section arises out of the placement of events which is a feature of irony displayed. Joab revises David's unworkable plan—the plan to put Uriah at the forefront of heavy fighting whilst withdrawing the other troops. However, under Joab's revised plan a number of soldiers die (11:17). As has already been mentioned, the criticism of David in this section emerges from Joab's rhetorical question. It must also be added that David coldly looks upon these soldier's deaths as a case of collateral damage (11:25). This irony is emphasized in a case of understatement.

11.2.1.15 David as a Danger to His Family

The punishment for David's sins is transferred onto the unnamed child of the illegitimate union of David and Bathsheba (12:13–14), and the child dies (12:19). The criticism of David's reaction to the child's death arises from the arrangement of events whereby David makes a grand display of repentance prior to the baby's death (12:16) but does not mourn after the baby's death (12:20). This criticism emerges in a combination of irony displayed and a rhetorical question.

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David orders Tamar to serve Amnon and as a consequence of this, she is raped (13:7). A reasonable person would have been suspicious of Amnon's plan. This criticism of David is made by way of an instance of the sub-category of pretended defence of the victim. David is also tricked by Absalom. Absalom tricks David into sending Amnon to be ambushed (13:23–26a), and killed (13:28). This is another ruse which a reasonable person would detect. It is also a case of pretended defence of the victim. In 15:10 David's own son declares himself to be the King of Israel, and begins a revolution against David. Yet, David leaves ten concubines behind in Jerusalem to look after the palace (15:16), leaving the concubines vulnerable to rape. The irony in this instance is low burlesque. By supporting two sons to be king David leaves members of his family vulnerable to be killed (1 Kgs 1:11–35).

11.2.1.16 David and Justice

One of the salient irony-based criticisms of David is his poor administration of justice. The problems with David's judgements in this respect can be categorised under the following headings: David's administration of justice is too harsh, David's administration of justice is too lenient, and David's administration of justice is inconsistent.

11.2.1.17 David's Administration of Justice Is Too Harsh

In 12:5–6 David orders the rich man in Nathan's Parable to be put to death for a minor offence. The pejorative criticism of David in this example emerges by way of irony by analogy. In 16:4 David gives away Mephibosheth's estate to Ziba without witnesses and a proper court case. This is both a breach of procedure and an excessively punitive measure taken against Mephibosheth. Both of these examples involve ironic overstatement.

11.2.1.18 David's Administration of Justice Is Too Lenient

In 13:21 David does not punish Amnon for raping Tamar, nor does he award any compensation to Tamar or her guardian. While there is no easy solution to this problem, David could have exiled Amnon. In another complex case David chooses not to punish Absalom for ordering the execution of Amnon (14:13). This criticism of Absalom emerges by way of a rhetorical criticism. In 18:5–7 David commands his soldiers to act gently with Absalom, despite the fact that Absalom has committed treason. This is a case of irony displayed.

11.2.1.19 David's Administration of Justice Is Inconsistent

In 14:24 David brings Absalom to Jerusalem but he keeps Absalom out of his sight. This is inconsistent with the oath that he has made to the woman of Tekoa. The criticism of David in this example arises from an ironic insinuation.

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In 19:21–23 David says that Shimei will not be put to death for cursing David. However, in 1 Kings 2:89 David tells Solomon to kill Shimei because of the curse. In 19:25–30 Mephibosheth tells David that Ziba tricked David into giving him Mephibosheth's estate. David's answer to this injustice is to split the estate between Ziba and Mephibosheth. In 1 Kings 1:11–35 David supports two sons to replace him as king.

11.2.1.20 David as the Corrupt Politician

David is better spoken of as a corrupt king rather than a corrupt politician. Nevertheless, there are a number of similarities between David and modern-day corrupt politicians. These similarities are best discussed under the titles: The cover-up, David as an opportunist, and David's political double-speak. The verbal irony in the narrative emphasizes David's corrupt nature.

11.2.1.21 The Cover-Up

In order to cover up his transgression David withdraws Uriah from the war and tries to coerce Uriah into sleeping with Bathsheba, including leaving a bribe for Uriah (11:6–8). The irony on this occasion is irony displayed. Uriah refuses to sleep with Bathsheba, and David pushes Uriah further by asking why he did not go down to his wife (11:10). Uriah scolds David by means of a rhetorical question for suggesting that he sleep with Bathsheba when all of Israel is at war with the ark at their side (11:11). Regardless of Uriah's protestations, and the fact that Uriah reminded David of the rules of holy war, David invites Uriah to a feast and tries to weaken Uriah's resolve so that he will sleep with Bathsheba, but Uriah steadfastly refuses to do so (11:13). This is another example of irony displayed. In 11:15 David sends Uriah back to battle with his own death-note, because David could not corrupt Uriah. The irony in this example arises from the incongruity between David's corrupt behaviour with Uriah's uprightness. This is another instance of irony displayed. Furthermore, Joab's revised plan to conceal David's transgression results in the death of a number of soldiers (11:17). Again, the criticism of David's decision is implied by way of an instance of the sub-category of irony displayed. David coldly looks upon the soldier's deaths as a case of collateral damage (11:25).

11.2.1.22 David as an Opportunist

In 9:1–13 David's 'kindness' to Mephibosheth is merely a calculated means of honouring his covenant to Jonathan without leaving his kingship vulnerable. In 12:27–28 Joab tells David that if he does not enter the battle and take the city of Rabbah Joab will name the city after himself. This is an example of

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pretended advice to the victim. David only enters the battle at this late stage and David takes the spoils of war (12:30–31). The irony-based criticism of David is made by way overstatement. An instance of parody occurs in 15:18 when David leaves Jerusalem and is stoned by a Saulide. The ironic implication is that David usurped Saul's throne. In another political move which is contrary to the conventions of Israelite society, David sends the ark back to Jerusalem to provide a cover for his spy network. (15:25–29). A rhetorical question emphasises the criticism of this action of David. Finally, in 18:1–2a there is an insinuation that David appoints men of questionable character to lead his army.

11.2.1.23 David's Political Double-Speak

David's duplicity is further evidenced in David's first interaction with Ittai. The ironist implies that David is engaged in political double-speak in this encounter (15:19–20). The irony-based criticism of David is made by way of rhetorical questions. In 15:24–29 David's request for the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, to act as his spies is another example of political double-speak. The irony in this instance is similarly made by way of a rhetorical question. In 19:11–12 David's threat to the elders of Judah is masked in political double-speak. David's double-speak to Amasa is an inducement in disguise (19:13). David's double-speak continues in his exchange with Barzillai (19:31–39).

11.2.1.24 David and God

Of note in the SN is David's relationship with God. Although God is not a main character in this narrative, God is a pivotal character as far as understanding the pejorative criticism of David is concerned. For God criticises David explicitly. Because God criticizes David directly there is little irony in the following section. However, the explicit criticism has been combined with the implicit irony-based criticism. For it is the cumulative effect that reveals the strength of God's disapproval. This section will be divided into two sections: God's displeasure with David; and Ambiguous encounters with God.

11.2.1.25 God's Displeasure with David

In 11:28 it is clearly written that God is displeased with David. God promises to punish David for taking Bathsheba and having Uriah killed (12:7–15). God recounts all of the things that God has given to David (12:7–9) and suggests that David is ungrateful. God scolds David and holds him responsible for Uriah's death (12:9). God tells David that the sword will never leave his house now that David has taken Uriah's wife, and that David has despised Yahweh (12:10). After hearing God's promised severe punishment (12:11–12), David finally appears to

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be repentant in 12:13. However, an ironic interpretation suggests that David's admission of guilt should not be entirely trusted. In 12:16 David prostrates himself on the ground and asks God for mercy. However, I have argued that the inordinately lengthy period of time during which David prostrates himself is comical. This is an instance of the sub-category of overstatement. In 12:20 there is an instance of the sub-category of irony displayed. This emphasizes both the fact that David does not mourn the death of the child, and that God does not grant David mercy (12:20).

11.2.1.26 Ambiguous Encounters with God

In 15:31 David implores God to turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness, despite David previously stating that he would accept without question whatever outcome God favoured (15:25). This shows David to be a hypocrite. The irony-based criticism emerges by way of a rhetorical question. David's prayers seem to be answered when Hushai appears in a place where God is traditionally worshipped (15:32), and David adds Hushai to his spy network (15:33–37). However, there is an ambiguity here and God's actions are regularly misinterpreted by the characters in the SN.

11.2.1.27 Suspicious Events in David's History

There are a few events in the SN which either call into question David's past behaviour, or remind the reader of David's past. The irony in the narrative brings these events into the foreground.

11.2.1.28 Events Which Call into Question David's Past

If Uriah were to sleep with Bathsheba as David suggests (11:8), he would violate the rules of ritual purity which soldiers were expected to uphold. David's behaviour here contradicts David's claims in 1 Samuel 21:5 that his soldiers are and ought to be ritually pure. This irony-based criticism of David is an instance of irony displayed. A further criticism of David emerges in 16:7–8 when Shimei curses David, and states that he believes that David's current predicament is because of David's treatment of the Saulides. The irony-based criticism of David in this section consists in the implication that there is likely to be some truth in Shimei's allegation. The irony-based criticism in this instance is an innuendo. In 16:10 David criticizes the sons of Zeruiah for their bloodthirsty nature (16:10), despite the fact that their actions benefited David and kept him free from bloodguilt. David's rhetorical question highlights David's close connection to the sons of Zeruiah. David's past glory of successfully fighting

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Goliath is parodied as a weak old Saulide pelts stones at David and his men as they flee (16:13–14).

11.2.1.29 Events Which Remind the Reader of David's Past

In 15:18 David's loyal troops are revealed to be men who fought with him when he fought with the Philistines. This reminds the reader of David's own mercenary rise to the throne. The irony-based criticism of David is made by way of parody.

While the above-mentioned events imply pejorative criticism of David, the keenest criticism of David is to be found in the other characters own comments concerning David. The following section lists the characters who are critical of David.

11.2.1.30 Characters Who are Critical of David

The characters who are critical of David can be divided into two different categories: Characters who are explicitly critical of David, and Characters who are implicitly critical of David. In the examples described in the first category the irony enhances the explicit pejorative criticism made by the characters. These instances of explicit criticism support my argument that the SN is very critical of David. The verses mentioned in the second category describe characters who are implicitly critical of David but whose criticism needs an ironic interpretation to be visible.

11.2.1.31 Characters Who are Explicitly Critical of David

Uriah's criticism of David is explicit since he tells David that it would be inappropriate for him to sleep with his wife when the soldiers are away at war with the ark of the covenant by their side (11:11). In 11:28 it is clearly written that God is displeased with David. Nathan is explicitly critical of David when he tells him that he (David) is the rich man in the parable (12:7). It is explicitly stated that God punishes David for taking Bathsheba and having Uriah killed (12:7–15). God recounts all of the things that God has given to David (12:7–9) and states that David is ungrateful. God scolds David and says that he holds him responsible for Uriah's death (12:9). God tells David that the sword will never leave his house now that David has taken Uriah's wife, and that David has despised Yahweh (12:10). Absalom is explicitly critical of David's decision not to administer justice in Absalom's own case (14:32). Absalom is explicitly critical of David's inability to administer justice generally (15:3). Shimei curses David in Bahurim and is explicitly critical of David's treatment of the Saulides

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(16:5). In 19:6 Joab is explicitly critical of David when he mentions that David loves those who hate him, and hates those who love him.

11.2.1.32 Characters Who Appear to be Critical of David

In 11:3 a rhetorical question implies that the messenger is critical of David's interest in Bathsheba. Similarly, Joab's rhetorical questions in 11:19–21 appear to be a scathing response to David's corruption. It cannot be said with certainty that David's servants are critical of David when they express surprise at his lengthy period of prostrating himself (12:18). However, there is a strong implied criticism of David when the servants express surprise that David feasts when there is an expectation that he mourns (12:21). The irony-based criticism of David in these examples are made by way of rhetorical questions. Joab is implicitly critical of David for not participating in the war when Joab says to David that if he does not come out and take the town, Rabbah, Joab will name the town after himself (12:27–28). The irony in this example is a case of overstatement. In 14:18 the woman of Tekoa is critical of David. Her ironic and undeserved praise of David implies that he is not a good administrator of justice. In 20:1 the Israelites imply that David will not honour their share in him.

The above-mentioned body of evidence supports the conclusion that the SN is generally very critical of David. Yet, David is not the only character who is portrayed unfavourably. The development of the other major characters in the SN will be presented in detail, beginning with Amnon.

11.2.2 *Amnon*

Although Amnon only appears briefly in the narrative, Amnon's character can be spoken of in the following ways: Amnon is weak-willed, Amnon is a fool, Amnon is manipulative and Amnon is a danger to others. These groupings show the commonalities in David and Amnon's natures.

11.2.2.1 Amnon Is Weak-Willed

Amnon is described as having a perverse attraction to his sister, Tamar, which is so intense that it is described as making him sick (13:4). This attraction is emphasised by the use of irony displayed.

11.2.2.2 Amnon Is a Fool

Amnon is portrayed as being foolish in 13:5 in an example of pretended defence of the victim. Amnon does not listen to Tamar's protestations in the form of rhetorical questions (13:12–13) and rapes her regardless, proving himself to be a fool (13:14). Amnon is shown to be capricious as his 'love' turns to loathing and he then throws Tamar out of his house despite her warning that this is

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worse than the rape (13:15). The irony-based pejorative criticism is made by way of overstatement, thus emphasizing Amnon's crime. Consequently, Amnon is murdered by Absalom's soldiers, because he raped Tamar (13:28).

11.2.2.3 Amnon Is Manipulative
In 13:6 Amnon is himself manipulative when he tricks his father into ordering Tamar to tend to him. The sub-category of verbal irony, insinuation, brings this point out.

11.2.2.4 Amnon Is a Danger to Others
Amnon rapes Tamar in 13:11.

11.2.2.5 Amnon as Lawbreaker
Amnon's rape of Tamar contravenes the laws of rape and incest (13:11).

There would appear to be no redeeming qualities in the characterisation of Amnon. This is not so easily said of Absalom.

11.2.3 *Absalom*
The first impression of Absalom in the SN is that he is protective of his sister, and angered at the rape. However, just like David and Amnon before him, Absalom is shown to react without appropriate restraint and to act contrary to the laws and conventions of Israel. The pejorative criticism of Absalom can be grouped under the following headings: Absalom is a law-breaker, Absalom is deceitful, Absalom's foolish misunderstandings, and Absalom is a danger to others.

11.2.3.1 Absalom Is a Lawbreaker
Absalom's initial transgression is his deep hatred of Amnon, even though this developed in response to the rape of Tamar (13:22). The sub-category of irony which is used to emphasize this is that of an insinuation. It can be assumed that Absalom broods over this incident for two years (13:23). However, Absalom's pivotal transgression is the order to his servants to kill Amnon (13:28). Absalom's complicity in this event emerges by way of a rhetorical question. In 13:34 Absalom flees Jerusalem. This event is emphasized in overstated language. Absalom then begins to mount an insurrection against the throne (15:1). There is an insinuation arising from Absalom's actions. In 16:20–22 Absalom takes Ahithophel's advice to set up a tent on the roof of the palace and have sex with David's concubines. The pejorative criticism of Absalom is emphasized by way of the use of the sub-category of verbal irony, praise in order to blame. Furthermore, this act means that Absalom is guilty of adultery,

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rape, and possibly incest. In 18:6–7 it is reported that Absalom is guilty of committing treason, as he and his men go to war against David's army. This is an example of an irony displayed. The irony-based pejorative criticism in these examples concerns the incongruity between the king's and the prince's (in line for the throne) duty to uphold the laws and their flagrant flouting of these laws.

11.2.3.2 Absalom Is Deceitful

Absalom is portrayed as similar to Amnon in his ability to manipulate David (13:24–26). This commonality presents as an insinuation in the text. So too, an insinuation presents in 14:28–30 when Absalom broods for two years and then explodes in violence (14:28–29). He orders his servants to set Joab's property on fire by way of summoning Joab (14:30). The irony in this case is a rhetorical question. Absalom manipulates the people of Israel. He implies by way of an innuendo that there is nobody to hear their claims (15:3). Absalom then ingratiates himself to the people of Israel, and gains their trust through deception (15:5–6). This process of ingratiation is emphasized by way of an insinuation. Absalom tricks David into allowing him to make a vow in Hebron (15:7). This involves a further insinuation. Absalom instructs a messenger to declare Absalom to be the king even though in fact David is still the king (15:10). This involves an ironic misrepresentation of the facts. Absalom manipulates, or gains favour with, (depending on which interpretation is preferred) a large number of people (15:11). The irony-based pejorative criticism of Absalom is made by way of irony displayed.

11.2.3.3 Absalom's Foolish Misunderstandings

Absalom believes that he is back in Jerusalem at God's instigation (15:8b). This is insinuated. However, he is unaware that he is back only because David has been tricked (14:10–14). Absalom is then met by Hushai (16:16) who has been sent as a spy to trick Absalom (15:33–36). Absalom is not immediately taken in by Hushai's deceit in an example of pretended agreement with the victim (16:15–16). However, Absalom proves himself to be a fool by providing Hushai with the advice provided to Absalom by Ahithophel (17:5–7). Absalom also proves himself to be a fool by telling Hushai that his advice is better than Ahithophel's advice, notwithstanding Hushai's apparent insincerity (17:14). This is a case of irony displayed.

11.2.3.4 Absalom Is a Danger to Others

Absalom is responsible for the unlawful murder of Amnon (13:28). This pejorative irony-based criticism emerges in a rhetorical question. Absalom mounts a

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challenge against the throne endangering numerous people (15:1). The pejorative criticism of Absalom in this section emerges by way of an insinuation. In 16:20–22 Absalom takes Ahithophel's advice, sets up a tent on the roof of the palace and has sex with David's concubines which may be considered to be rape. The irony-based pejorative criticism of Absalom is by way of the sub-category of praise in order to blame. Most grievously, Absalom is responsible for a civil war in which there are a number of deaths (18:5–7). The irony-based criticism in this instance is made by way of the sub-category of impersonal irony, irony displayed.

11.2.4 *Solomon*

Although, we only encounter Solomon as an adult in the last two chapters of the SN we still learn that he is not the rightful king and that he is a lawbreaker. Solomon's deficits will be spoken of under two headings; Solomon is not the rightful king, and; Solomon is a lawbreaker.

11.2.4.1 Solomon Is not the Rightful King

In the early verses of 1 Kings we discover, by way of an innuendo, that Adonijah is the rightful heir to the throne (1 Kgs. 1:5–7). The mixed irony in the lengthy section 1 Kings 11–35 suggests that David had unjustifiably made an oath at some time in the distant past that Solomon should be king despite David's support for Adonijah to also be king. Regardless of this confusion, Solomon was not the rightful heir to the throne. Indeed, the irony in 1 Kings 1:36–37 implies that God has not ordained Solomon to be king. Furthermore, Adonijah implies that Solomon is not the rightful king (1 Kgs. 2:15–17), and Solomon himself suggests that he is not the rightful king (1 Kgs. 2:22).

11.2.4.2 Solomon Is a Lawbreaker

In 1 Kings 2:23–24 Solomon unjustly orders Adonijah's death. Solomon unlawfully exiles Abiathar (1 Kgs. 2:26–27). Solomon orders for Joab to be killed when he is holding onto the horns of the altar (1 Kgs. 2:29). Solomon unreasonably orders the execution of Shimei (1 Kgs. 2:36–46).

A comparison of the characters of David, Amnon, Absalom and Solomon demonstrates that all of these men are law-breakers, and are dangerous to others. Furthermore, the characters of David, Amnon, and Absalom are easily fooled, and are happy to manipulate others for their own gain. In some cases, the pejorative criticism of these characters is explicit, still in other cases the criticism is merely implicit. In the latter cases, either the criticism is itself implicit or prior explicit criticism is emphasised by implication. In both kinds of case the pejorative criticism is irony-based and relies on ironic interpretation.

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11.2.5 *Summary*

My argument consists in large part in the application of Muecke's taxonomy of verbal irony to the SN. This application has yielded some important results. Specifically, a very large number of central and credible examples of verbal irony have been identified. This demonstrates the presence of pervasive verbal irony in the SN. As the above extensive collection of characterisations shows, the central characters in the SN, notably David, are the objects of sustained ironic attack.

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CHAPTER 12

Conclusion

Scholarly work undertaken over decades to determine the genre of the SN has yielded multiple different theories. In chapter ten I have provided a comparative discussion of the various competing theories of the genre of SN: satire; national epic; propaganda; wisdom literature; theological history; literary art.

My findings support the proposition that the broad genre type to which the SN belongs is that of literary art, given the aesthetic qualities of the narrative. This research supports Gunn's proposition that the SN is a serious work of art. However, on my own interpretation the author of the SN intends to be highly critical of David's moral transgressions. So, my interpretation of the SN differs from that of Gunn. Gunn argues that the SN is not a moral tale. The findings of my research have more in common with Van Seters' argument that the material in the SN has satirical features (as opposed to constituting a satire). However, whereas Van Seters suggests that this material is akin to a *njals saga*, according to my own interpretation the SN is a satire. I argue that the designation of satire is more precise than that of *njals sagas* since the latter are not always satirical in nature.

The essential feature of satire is a pervasive sense of irony which is intentional and pejoratively critical of some person, idea etc. Since, as I have argued, the irony in question is verbal irony and therefore intentional, there is a need to accept the existence of authorial intention, although from this it does not follow that the author is the only source of textual meaning. To satisfy the claim that a work is satire one must demonstrate that it has a pervasive sense of irony, provide evidence of a few of the other features of satire, and demonstrate that there is an object of ironic attack. This work is focused in large part on irony, as irony is the essential element of a satire. Moreover, since verbal irony is the type of irony found in satire, the focus of this work is in large part on verbal irony. Specifically, Douglas Muecke's taxonomy of verbal irony has been applied to the SN, (although his account of irony has been modified—see below). To a lesser extent this work has applied David Marcus' taxonomy of elements of satire to the SN in order to discern the other features of satire including, fantastic events, grotesqueries, distortions, ridicule, parody, and rhetorical features. It has been argued that there is a pervasive sense of irony in the SN, along with examples of the other lesser features of satire, and that

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there is an object of ironic attack. These findings are sufficient to demonstrate that the SN is a work of satire; this finding is an important and novel perspective on the SN.

Scholars who have written on irony in the SN have not hitherto utilised Muecke's definitions, or done a thoroughgoing analysis of the SN in terms of verbal irony. Therefore, irony in the SN has not been considered from the perspective that the SN is a satire. Muecke claims that there are three essential elements in all types of irony. These are as follows: two different levels in the narrative (explicit and implicit), an opposition between the levels, and the presence of 'innocence.' Moreover, as Muecke points out, verbal irony always involves an ironist and, therefore, the irony is intentional; in short, verbal irony and, indeed, satire presupposes authorial intention.

I have diverged in some important respects from Muecke's account. Firstly, there is a need to distinguish, as Muecke does not always do, between the feigned ignorance of the ironist and the actual ignorance of the victim. Second, there is a need to distinguish, as Muecke does not always do, between the victim of irony—in the sense of the person who is confidently unaware of the irony—and the object or target of ironic attack. In verbal irony there is always an object of ironic attack. The object of ironic attack is always someone or something that is the object of pejorative criticism. Notice that the victim of irony is not necessarily the object of ironic attack.

If a literary work contains verbal irony then there must be an ironist, or in other words, a character, a narrator or an author who is being ironical. If a literary work has a pervasive sense of verbal irony then—assuming also the presence of some other elements of satire—the literary work is a satire. Since the SN meets these conditions it is a satire. Moreover, the primary ironist is also a satirist and, of course, there is an object of ironic attack, be that a person(s) or an idea or whatever.

The SN is very critical of David, Amnon, Absalom, Solomon and other members of the royal court. The pejorative criticism of David, who is the primary target of attack in his role as king, is both explicit and implicit. More generally, the SN portrays King David, Absalom, Amnon and Solomon as corrupt. This much I take myself to have demonstrated and in doing so undermined the perspectives on David, in particular, that historically have dominated interpretations of the SN. Although recently more negative perspectives on David have emerged, none have provided the weight of evidence that has been provided in this work.

I have concluded that the SN is a work of satire. Being a satire, there is a satirist/ironist who is seeking to make the audience (presumably, including the Israelites) aware of the vices of the characters. Of course, as mentioned in

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Chapter 1 and 2, it is part of the point of verbal irony, and satire, to bring about the correction of vices. This being so, the SN has a moral purpose albeit, in the case of the SN, within a theological framework.

The SN indicates that there are consequences for moral transgressions—consequences which go beyond personal suffering. In the case of David's transgressions, all of Israel had to suffer a war. Importantly, the satirist emphasizes that God is the author of the moral laws, and that the king's job is merely to impartially administer these laws. Given that the primary purpose of satire is reform, it may then be argued that the author of the SN sought reform in the monarchy of Israel and did so in the context of an overall theological framework. This view of the SN as satire in the service of political reform within a theological framework is an original scholarly view but one that, nevertheless, ordinary members of a faith-based community might find compelling. Indeed, as discussed above in relation to Prime Minister Netanyahu's alleged corruption, this scholarly view has implications for the behaviour of political leaders and political reform in contemporary faith-based communities confronting corruption in government and, for that matter, in religious institutions.

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